

BREAKTHROUGH!

PRAYERFUL PRODUCTIVE FIELD RESEARCH
IN YOUR PLACE OF MINISTRY

2nd Edition

Stan Nussbaum

Illustrated by Dick Stump

DAI A4 Print Edition

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Breakthrough!

Prayerful Productive Field Research in Your Place of Ministry

Stan Nussbaum. Illustrated by Dick Stump.



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*Dedicated to Lorri,
whose love and spirituality are beyond researching*

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11. “Breakthrough – More” may be available from your DAI instructor in printed or electronic form. It includes about 60 more pages of additional explanations and illustrations linked to the text. Versions of Breakthrough! intended for on-screen reading include “Breakthrough – More” with hyperlinks from the main text. In printed versions, only the link topics are shown, indicated by the following format:	

More . . .

[1.2.A Can you afford to skip this introductory chapter and go straight to Chapter 2?](#)

Note: A more detailed table of contents for each chapter is given at the beginning of the chapter.

PREFACE

Everyone learns from his or her experiences in ministry. The aim of this guide is to help people learn more from their experiences than they would have otherwise, and learn it quicker and more easily. If they can solve some of their mysteries, understand their successes, and grow into their ministry roles through the Breakthrough process, their frustrations will go down and their effectiveness will go up. Jesus will be lifted higher than before.

That was the way field research helped me during my work as a Bible teacher with African indigenous churches in Lesotho many years ago. I am grateful to Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission for sponsoring it and the University of South Africa, especially Professor Inus Daneel, for guiding me through it. Ever since that experience, I have been experimenting with various ways of passing on the same skills through workshops, an e-mail course, and now via the 2nd edition of this guide.

The aim of the original work and all the updates is to strengthen two weak areas in mission training. First, the guide provides an additional option for in-service training programs, which are increasingly recognized as valuable supplements to pre-field study and on-field orientation. Second, it tries to overcome the artificial post-Enlightenment dichotomy between pursuing “truth” through scientific methods and pursuing “the will of God” through religious methods. The aim here is to combine scientific and religious approaches in order to get at the “truth” that people in ministry most want to know – God’s guidance in and for their ministry situation.

My thanks (and my sympathies) go to all the pioneers who worked their way through the previous versions. I taught those in five African countries, three Asian, and one each in Europe, North America, and Latin America. I am currently teaching the course in conjunction with masters programs run by Development Associates International (DAI) in several countries, Wheaton College, and WorldView Institute (Portland). Individual students from a variety of other agencies have also helped me immensely as they worked through the e-mail version of the Breakthrough course.

This 2nd edition is a major rewrite of the 2007 printed version, streamlining the process, incorporating many suggestions and examples from previous users, and capitalizing on the switch to an electronic format. DAI colleagues David Fraser and Beverley Booth and GMI colleagues Jim McGee and Mike O’Rear have all been encouraging and helpful during the revision process. Hopefully I have not replaced my old mistakes with new ones. If I have, please do point them out since updates are now possible electronically on an ongoing basis.

Whether or not this guide represents a breakthrough in mission training is for others to judge. But I can pray to that end, and I can ask you to join me in praying that, at least for you personally, it will prove to be so. May your use of this guide turn out to be one of the most profitable training experiences of your life.

*Stan Nussbaum
August 2011*

1. GETTING INTO POSITION FOR INSIGHT

Chapter contents:

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Four killers of research motivation

1.2 Five breaths of life for research projects

1.0 Introduction

This guide will help you get a clearer picture of other people's thoughts and feelings about your ministry. By understanding people better, you will get into a better position to hear what God wants to tell you about serving them.

As you work through the guide, you will develop basic skills in field research, apply them to one issue or aspect of your ministry, and take action based on the insights that emerge from your research. Rather than studying an academic subject and then later trying to deduce an application to your real life question, *you will start with your real life question and do field research that helps you deal with that question directly and on its own terms.* To do field research on your own ministry means:

*Asking the right questions
to the right people in the right way
in order to gather information that provides fresh insight
leading toward creative recommendations and actions
according to God's will and for his glory.
(cf. Phil. 1:9-11)*

This Breakthrough guide will unpack this definition one step at a time. It may look simple but the Breakthrough field research process is not quick, simple or certain to get you the breakthrough you need. The process is, however, guaranteed to make you better at listening to God and better at listening to the people in your situation. Improvement

in those two areas often leads to breakthrough insights that open the way to actual breakthroughs in ministry.

Field research on your own ministry is obviously different from *library or Internet research*. You will do a small amount of that at the beginning, but you will not depend on it to tell you what the people around you are thinking. You will go ask them. Instead of reading books about what other people have found out, you will write the "book" (or report) about what you find out during your own research.

Breakthrough research is not the same as *ethnographic research*, a common type of mission research that aims to describe a particular culture and society. Neither is it what people usually mean when they talk of *strategic mission research*, gathering data about things that can be mapped, such as locations of churches, percentage of Christians in each province, etc. *Breakthrough research* focuses on one particular issue in your ministry situation, and it explores it by digging into the minds and hearts of the people involved.

More . . . (see electronic version)

[1.0.A Is Breakthrough research the right approach for your situation?](#)

[1.0.B Do you have time for Breakthrough research?](#)

[1.0.C Possible alternatives to doing a Breakthrough project at all](#)

Table 1.0 Preview of the Breakthrough Research Process

Ch.	Focus	Questions for self-checking on each aspect
1	(Prep: relating research to life)	Have I avoided the “Four Killers” of research projects? Have I connected my research thinking to the “Five Breaths of Life”? Will doing this project help me become a different person?
2	(Prep: framing your concern)	Did I properly frame my research topic through the Master Worksheet? Is my insight question the best question I could use as the focus for my field research?
3	(Prep: brainstorming and networking)	With the help of friends as well as library and Internet resources, have I made reasonable guesses about possible answers to my insight question? Do I know which aspects of my topic I will have to ask my respondents about?
5 ¹	<i>Asking the right questions</i>	Did my questions go deep enough to find out what I really wanted to know? Did they meet the TEACUP criteria? Were they field-tested before being widely used? Did I fail to ask any questions that would have thrown a different light on my findings?
4 ²	<i>To the right people in the right way</i>	Did I plan the project wisely? How well chosen was the sample? If I had talked to twice as many people, would much more have been learned? How appropriate were the methods?
6	<i>In order to gather information</i>	Did I execute the plan in a disciplined manner? How well did I “get R.E.A.L.” and avoid the common pitfalls that kill undisciplined research projects? Did the respondents feel free to speak their minds? Might they have just told me what they thought I wanted to hear? Did I stick to the questions as they are written?
7	<i>That provides fresh insight</i>	Did I come up with any new insights? Have I presented my conclusions in a clear and compelling way? Did I read anything into the data that is not there? Did I overlook data that seems to go against my conclusion? Is my reporting of data honest, complete and unbiased? Would someone else easily draw the same conclusions from the data that I did?

¹ This chapter number (5) is deliberately reversed with 4 because of the way the definition of Breakthrough research is worded. The action of chapter 4 precedes the action of chapter 5 even though the definition reverses their order.

² See previous footnote re: number sequence.

8	<i>Leading toward creative recommendations</i>	How naturally do my recommendations grow out of my findings? Do they seem to be stuck on artificially, like horns tied onto a cow? How realistic are the suggestions? How creative and inspired do they look?
9	<i>And actions according to God's will</i>	How well have I begun to follow through on my suggestions? Have I strategically promoted and implemented one of my main recommendations? Have I brought friends into that process?
10	<i>And for his glory</i>	Is anything different than it was before? How much of a breakthrough is evident? What has God done as I started to follow through on my plan of action?

The key to the whole Breakthrough process described in the table is asking the right questions, but you will never know what the right *questions are* until you know what the right *question is*, the one main question that will be the integrating center of your whole research project. We call this your “insight question.” You will need new insights to answer it, and you will do your research in order to get those insights.

Finding and framing that one right question is so important that the first two chapters of the guide will be devoted entirely to it. As you will see, it is much trickier to state the right insight question than it is to choose a research topic.

1.1 Four killers of research motivation

You will not, however, get very serious about stating a good insight question if you believe any of the following lies, the “Four killers.” If one or more of these four statements describes your feelings about doing research on the people around you, read “More . . .” (top of next column) to see how and why they can kill your project before you even start. If you already see the dangers, skip down to heading 1.2.

More . . .

1.1.A “I already know what they think.”

1.1.B “God will guide me whether I know what they think or not.”

1.1.C “Research is artificial. The way to find out what people think is to watch and listen day by day, not to do interviews and surveys.”

1.1.D “Even if I find out what they think, it won’t improve my ministry.”

1.2 Five breaths of life for research projects

If you expect to get insights that lead you toward more fruitful service, it helps greatly to see from the beginning how this research project will relate to five other things in your life:

1. The honor and glory of God
2. Your ministry or service
3. Your habits of mind (your approach to thinking about life and ministry)
4. The academic world of field research
5. Any thesis or other research project you may later build on this one

If you understand how your research project relates to these five things, it will take on a life of its own. It will be less of a chore and more of a friend. It will engage you, and you will not have to push it along like a classroom assignment. The rest of this chapter will help you make connections so you can enjoy them all the way through the Breakthrough process.

More . . .

[1.2.A Can you afford to skip this introductory chapter and go straight to Chapter 2?](#)

1.2.1 This research project and the honor and glory of God

The Breakthrough process assumes that you are living in Christ and he is living in you, that you are already involved in some kind of ministry or service, and that you want your life and your service to bring glory to him. If any of those things are not true of you, using this guide will probably be about as much fun as trying to run a race in shoes that do not fit. But if the shoe fits, wear it. Enjoy the Breakthrough process from start to finish, and see what God will do to glorify his name and build his reputation through you.

“My Father is honored by this, that you bear much fruit and show that you are my disciples.” (Jn. 15:8) A fruitful ministry honors God because it is a sign of his power at work, and people love and praise him when they see that. It is what he intended for us and what he makes us capable of as we stay attached to Christ, the True Vine.

Perhaps you are wondering whether research is really the way to fruitfulness since we do not have clear New Testament examples of it, with the possible exception of Paul in Athens. Let me suggest that the New Testament

mandate for research is hiding in plain sight in both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

The Great Commission is a command to make disciples, and how can we make disciples of people we do not understand? Field research is an attempt to deepen our understanding of people in order to improve our communication and multiply our disciple-making.

The Great Commandment includes loving God with all our mind, but the idea of “loving with the mind” is so foreign to us that we read right past it. What does it mean but putting our minds to work with God and for God? This includes the intense intellectual work of designing questions, listening carefully and analyzing fairly.

Research is loving God with the mind. It is also loving the neighbor. One of the highest and most appreciated aspects of love is the willingness to spend time listening to the loved one in order to understand him or her better. Research is a sign of love and respect. If we want to make disciples, love God, and love our neighbors, we are wise to spend some of our time on research. It is an excellent way to honor him.

We must, however, have his glory as our main goal like Nehemiah did during his research in preparation for repairing Jerusalem’s walls. Otherwise the results can be fatal. The example of this is one of the best-kept secrets in the Bible. 1 Chron. 21 describes the census David took to find out how much military manpower his nation had. Satan put the research idea into his head (v. 1), Joab protested (v. 3), David insisted on going ahead (v. 4), God was furious (v. 7) and David repented of it (v. 8), but 70,000 still died from the plague God sent (v. 14).

David was not using research for God's glory but apparently for his own glory and his own strategic purposes. He wanted to know how strong he was in human terms. In other words, he was doing exactly what we ourselves may be tempted to do when we turn to research today. Are we trying to figure out what we will be able to do with our own resources and strategies even if God does nothing?

The peril of such thinking cannot be overstated. It comes from Satan and leads to self-trust which leads to death. If our research is tainted with this kind of thinking, it should be abandoned before it is even begun. Otherwise we may find ourselves abandoned by God, left to the devices of our own wisdom based on our own research conclusions.

If we want to gain strategic insight that will bring fruit and not death, both the motivation and the process of our research must be wrapped up in the glory of God. Our controlling desire must be the desire to bring glory to God through our research just as through any other part of our ministry, and prayer must constantly accompany the process of seeking insight. Prayer is the safeguard against Satanic, self-glorifying motivation in our research or boastful use of our research findings. May God and God alone get all the credit for the insights he gives us in answer to our prayers.

Suggested prayer: Lord, please make this research project one of the most God-honoring things I have ever done. Give me so much insight that people will know it obviously could not have come from me. May they praise you more than ever.

1.2.2 This research project and your ministry or service

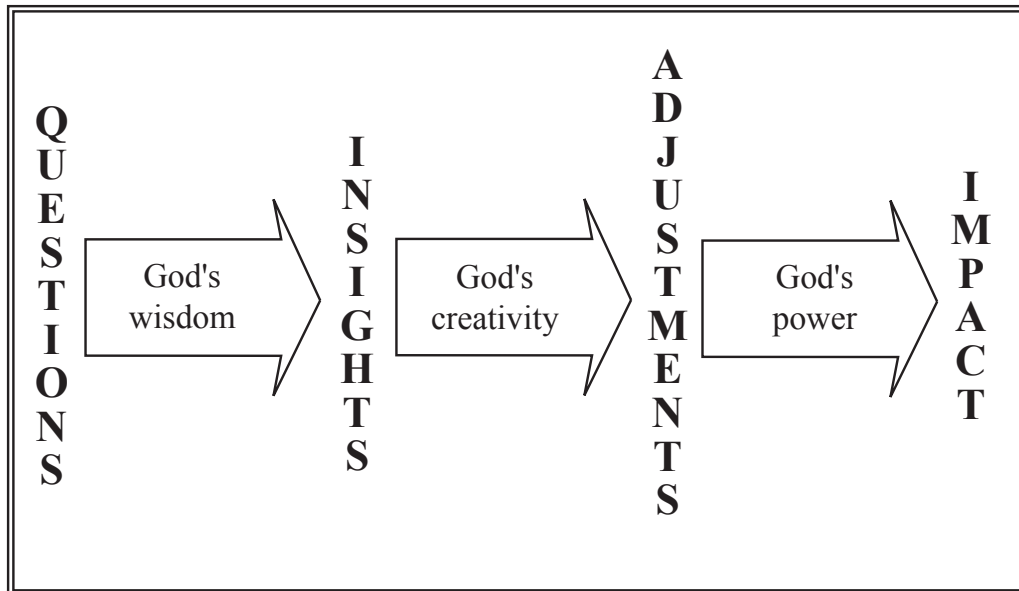
Your whole research process (Diagram 1.2.2) will focus on one of the real life concerns that are already on your prayer list because they are affecting your ministry somehow. By using the "Master Worksheet" that will guide your entire project, you will learn how to turn a prayer concern into a research topic. You will still pray, of course, but you will not assume, "All we can do is pray." You will develop the habit of taking the next step that accompanies prayer, which is research.

The goal of all the praying and all the research is to discern God's will and tap his wisdom and creativity so you can make adjustments in the way you do your ministry and you can see more impact.

Since the goal of the Breakthrough process is impact through your ministry for the glory of God, your relationship to the guide (and to a "teacher" if you have one) is more like your relationship to a coach than a lecturer. The lecturer prepares you to take an exam; the coach prepares you to have an impact in the game. When you have more impact in your ministry, you do more good. People "see your good deeds and give honor to your Father in heaven." (Mt. 5:16)

Breakthroughs in our ministries are small pieces of the big Breakthrough, the one Jesus announced, the breakthrough of the kingdom or reign of God on earth. Jesus brought the good news that the old era was over and "breakthrough time" was beginning (see Mk. 1:15). In this new era it is our amazing privilege to be part of God's breaking in on the world. We get to explain to the world what is happening. We get to show them how it works.

Diagram 1.2.2 The Breakthrough Process



As we do so, our Lord also breaks through in our own hearts and heads, changing us from inexperienced to experienced, from naïve to insightful, from baffled to confident, from stunted to fruitful. He graciously moves us from arrogant blindness to humble understanding.

My prayer is that he will use this guide to help that process along in your life and your ministry team. The goal is not only to do one project and make improvements in one area of your ministry. The goal is also to become a different person.

This does not mean that from now on you will be doing formal research projects all the time. You will probably do very few of those in the rest of your life but you may get more effective in ministry by using several research skills in your normal activity. For example, you will know how to write a case study describing the background of a prayer concern so that others can join you in praying about it and/or discussing it.

You will know how to ask penetrating questions about the concern. You will get better at recognizing important information and analyzing it. You will also get better at leading discussion groups to decide what adjustments to make in your ministry.

Suggested prayer: Lord, please grant me your wisdom, creativity, and power so that by the end of my Breakthrough project, my ministry will have more impact than ever before and I will be more of the person you want me to be.

1.2.3 This research project and your habits of mind (your approach to thinking about life and ministry)

The most common “habit of mind” that this course will help you break is *the habit of separating classroom work from the real world of ministry*. For the most part, people do not

study the problems they pray about. Prayer relates to what happens in their ministry or mission. Study relates to the classroom and the library. Prayer is specific to their situation; study is generic, often involving books written by people in entirely different situations. Prayer is about what is happening in ministry right now; study is preparation for the future. Prayer is prayer, study is study, and (almost) “never the twain shall meet.”

Many research students who have done this course as part of their masters program have been surprised that they are allowed to get academic credit for studying something small and practical within their own situations. They assume that “research” will have to be something huge and high sounding, but the Breakthrough process is very down to earth. It has given them permission to change their habits of mind. It has guided them toward combining prayer and study (research) on the way to a breakthrough in ministry.

You should not be like the people who pray a lot about their ministry problems but never study them or the people who are excellent researchers of ministry but rarely pray. Both are lopsided. Prayer and research belong together. They should be as intertwined as loving God with the heart and loving God with the mind.

The premise for this entire guide is this:

Prayer and research are not substitutes for each other.

Consider the picture. Which contributes more to a breakthrough discovery here — the binoculars or the eye? Obviously, they need each other. So do prayer and research.



Connecting prayer and research will be much easier for you if you consciously reject some common assumptions (“habits of mind”) about impact in ministry. These overlap somewhat with the “[Four killers](#)” mentioned above, though not at all points.

More . . .

1.2.3.A First wrong assumption: Success in ministry depends on who you know, not what you know.

1.2.3.B Second wrong assumption: Success in ministry is all up to God and you will never understand it.

1.2.3.C Third wrong assumption: Success in ministry depends on knowing God’s will, and we know it through prayer. Research has nothing to do with it.

1.2.3.D Fourth wrong assumption: Nothing will change much no matter what new insights you get from your research.

Of course, there is a bit of truth in all of these wrong assumptions, and in some cultures some of them may be taken for granted

by almost everyone. However, they do not ring true in the end.

If they look normal and true to you, you will have very little motivation to do research about your ministry situation. It will just be a classroom exercise to satisfy a lecturer and get a degree. However, sometimes as you go along, your habits of mind start to change.

More . . .

[1.2.3.E Example from Nigeria](#)

I will not try to argue you out of these assumptions now, but I will pray that as you go through the Breakthrough process, you will convince yourself that all of these common ideas are untrue. By the end, you should be able to point out their weaknesses, if you cannot already do so. There are better habits of mind for you as you approach your ministry.

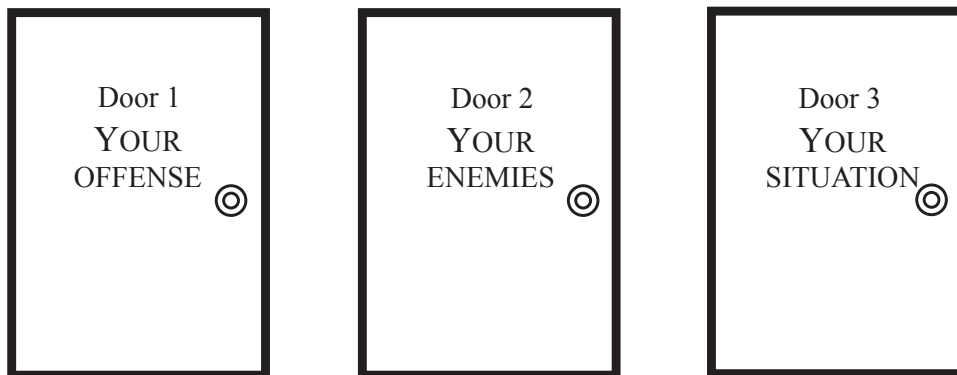
Paul introduces several of them in his prayer for the Philippians. Look how he ties together the themes of love, knowledge, insight, decision, character, fruit, Christ, and the glory of God:

And I pray this, that your love may abound even more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight so that you can decide what is best, and thus be sincere and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:9-11)

These are the habits to cultivate.

Besides the wrong assumptions about *what causes impact in ministry*, there are also wrong habits of mind about *what prevents impact*. These habits of mind determine where people will focus their research. Consider the following diagram.

Diagram 1.2.3 The Three Doors



Door 1 represents your own sin. If you as a pastor are stealing the church's money and you wonder why your evangelistic sermons are not having much impact, you do not need to wonder for very long. Your offense is preventing impact.

Door 2 represents your enemies – the human ones, the structural or institutional ones, and the spiritual powers. These consciously want to control you and prevent impact from your ministry.

Door 3 represents your situation. Your lack of understanding of your situation may prevent the impact you want your ministry to have.

Note that different groups of people habitually look behind some of the doors but not others. The academic world assumes that all “real” or valid explanations of causes are behind Door 3. Explanations related to Door 1 and Door 2 are ridiculed as superstitious rubbish. If you offer a Door 1 or Door 2 explanation for anything you are studying, you will flunk out of any university in the world.

Traditionalists around the world do just the opposite. They ignore Door 3, looking only behind Doors 1 and 2. They ask, “How did I bring this disaster on myself?” and, “Which of my enemies has cursed me?”

We believe that the academics and the traditionalists both have part of the truth, but only the part their worldview allows them to see. The Breakthrough approach, based on a Christian worldview, takes all three doors seriously.

Most of the Breakthrough guide deals with Door 3 using methods very similar to those of secular academics. You will be trying to get deeper into the minds and hearts of the people in your ministry situation, but before you do, you must check Door 1 and Door 2. Have you offended God (Door 1)? Are enemies and evil powers attacking you (Door 2)? If so, it would be a huge waste of time to do a research project on your situation (Door 3). You would not find your breakthrough even if you did enough research on Door 3 to write a report of a thousand pages.

More . . .

[1.2.3.F Suggestions for self-examination \(Door 1\)](#)

[1.2.3.G Example from Peru – embarrassing yourself by looking behind the wrong door \(Door 2\)](#)

[1.2.3.H Example from Ukraine—discovering a new way to pray \(about Door 3\)](#)

If the thing preventing impact in your ministry is behind Door 1, the answer is in *God’s mercy*. If it is behind Door 2, the answer is in *God’s power*. If it is behind Door 3, the answer is in *God’s wisdom*. The way to a breakthrough is to check all three doors. Only then can you discover whether it is primarily *God’s mercy, power or wisdom* (or some combination) that needs to be brought to bear on whatever is preventing your breakthrough.

Suggested prayer: Father of light, rearrange my mind. Root out my wrong assumptions and my old flawed ways of looking at ministry. Turn my thoughts to your thoughts. Let my mind serve the purpose for which you gave it.

More . . .

[1.2.3.I The importance of prayer for research](#)

1.2.4 This research project and the academic world, especially the social sciences

We have already seen how the academic world focuses only on “Door 3” solutions. Now let us look more closely at the way the

Breakthrough approach both overlaps and differs from secular research in the social sciences. You may be surprised to realize that you already use some social science research methods all the time.

Do you know more about your ministry or service now than you did on the first day you tried to do it? Of course you do. How did you learn it? You probably had a little bit of training from a supervisor or another colleague, but most of what you know today you learned because you researched it.

I do not mean you looked things up in books or did a survey. You “researched” it by using the two research methods that people use all the time without realizing they are researching, namely *participant observation* and *experimentation*. You are a “participant” in your organization and you are always “observing” what goes on around you. In addition, you are always “experimenting,” that is, you are trying to do things in a new way to see if it works better (unless your heart is not in your ministry and you are merely doing it to earn money).

During the Breakthrough process you will add four other research methods to these two that you already use. The others are *case study*, *interview*, *survey*, and *focus group*.

Table 1.2.4 Research Methods

Methods you already use	New methods
Participant observation Experimentation	Case study Interview Survey Focus group

These research methods are included in the Breakthrough process in the following way.

1. The case study helps you make sure you are asking the right “insight question” (the main question that will be the focus for your research).

2. Interviews and a survey help you answer the insight question.

3. The focus group helps you apply that answer to your situation.

You may also use the participant observation and experimentation methods if you wish, but those methods are not required because you are already familiar with them. Experiments usually take too long to finish during a research class unless they are very small and specific.

These six basic research methods and many others are described and debated in great detail by academics, and the Breakthrough process copies many of their features. However, this guide will not use much research jargon or tell you much about the current theories of research, except via the reading list at the end of each chapter. You are not being prepared for an exam but for a breakthrough and for a whole life of breakthroughs.

To help you toward this goal, the Breakthrough guide has to do much more than teach you to apply secular research methods to Christian ministry problems. In fact, the Breakthrough approach to research goes so far beyond the secular that secular academics would dismiss it out of hand. The Breakthrough process is:

- aimed at a Christian goal – knowing the will of God
- based on a Christian approach – interlaced with prayer
- done in a Christian style – humble, servant-hearted

More . . .

[1.2.4.A Why secular academics reject the Breakthrough process](#)

[1.2.4.B A plea to the Christian academic establishment](#)

Suggested prayer: Father of wisdom, let me capitalize on what the academic world has discovered about research but let me also go beyond it to discern your will about my situation. Let me read my ministry context well, even between the lines.

1.2.5 This research project and any thesis or other research you may later build on it

If you are doing a Breakthrough project as a pilot study or a steppingstone to a full thesis for a graduate degree,³ the following information may be useful. Otherwise skip this section and [go to the next chapter](#).

Think of your Breakthrough project as a first short visit to a city you are planning to come back and spend a longer time in next year. You could use your first visit to quickly go around the whole city or you might decide to focus on one particular thing such as the historic sites, the business district, or the neighborhood where you are staying with friends. Here are several ways you can do the same thing with your Breakthrough project, expecting that in your thesis you will revisit the same research topic or a closely related one.

1.2.5.1 Identify 3 or more sample groups. Use one of them for your Breakthrough project and save the others for your thesis.

³ Because of the practical orientation of the Breakthrough Project, your transition will be easiest if you are pursuing a degree that has a practical focus, such as a D.Min. or a D.Miss. However, Breakthrough training also has been successfully used within several M.A. programs and as a steppingstone to a Ph.D. program.

More . . .

[1.2.5.1.A Example from Uganda](#)

[1.2.5.1.B What is a sample group?](#)
(See section 4.1.1.)

1.2.5.2 If you are considering an insight question that is very large, break it into three or more questions and use only one of them for your Breakthrough project. Set the other questions aside until you do your full thesis.

More . . .

[1.2.5.2.A Example from Southeast Asia](#)

1.2.5.3 Do an evaluative “longitudinal study,” that is, a study of the same group over time. Do the first measurement for your Breakthrough project and the second measurement for your thesis.

More . . .

[1.2.5.3.A Example from Nigeria](#)

1.2.5.4 Recognize that things may change between now and the time you start your thesis. Your topic may no longer be suitable.

More . . .

[1.2.5.4.A Examples of ways things change between your Breakthrough project and the time you start on your thesis](#)

Suggested prayer: Lord of the future, I do not know what my situation will be when it is time to start my thesis but you do. Please guide me to design my Breakthrough project in a way that will prepare me for the things you know are in my future.

Articles in Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org)

- “Qualitative research”
- “Participatory action research” – very similar to Breakthrough research though it usually puts more emphasis on the involvement of a group of people as a research team rather than an individual doing research
- “Quantitative research”

Readings in Robson, Real World Research, 2nd ed.

Pages	Starting point (section or chapter title)	Notes and instructions
3-15	“Real World Enquiry”	Introductory material, including a description of the “fixed” and “flexible” approaches to research design
16-44	“Approaches to Social Research”	Favors “critical realism” as the alternative to “positivism” (too confident about objectivity of research) and “constructivism” (too subjective).

A Blessing

No matter how frustrated or confused you may be in your ministry, no matter how long you have been that way, no matter how doubtful you are that this guide will do you any good, may the Lord do you good as only he can. As you learn to combine research and prayer, may the Lord make the whole Breakthrough process a voyage of discovery.

2. FRAMING YOUR CONCERN

Chapter contents:

- 2.1 Considering possible research topics
 - 2.2 Checking with your in-house supervisor
 - 2.3 Writing your introductory case study
 - 2.4 How to organize your case study
 - 2.5 Guidelines for progress checks with your in-house supervisor
-

2.1 Considering possible re-search topics

If you have avoided the “Four killers” of motivation for research and inhaled the “Five breaths of life” that connect research to your life, you are ready to start choosing and framing your research topic. Fortunately you already have what it takes to succeed at this, if only you can recognize it.

“What is that in your hand?” the LORD asked Moses at the burning bush. (Ex. 4:2) Perhaps he is asking you the same question today. You may be faced with a challenge in your ministry like Moses was at that point, and you may not realize that God wants to give you victory by transforming something obvious, something that is already in your hand. It is not a staff like Moses’ staff. It is your experience in your ministry.

You have noticed some things you were not aware of when you started your ministry. They may be things that challenge you or confuse you. They may be new opportunities for ministry. Whether good or bad, many or few, these things are on your mind and you are not yet sure what the Lord wants you to do about them. You are praying about them,

longing for more insight so you can be a more fruitful branch on the Vine.⁴

During the Breakthrough research process, you will focus on one of these things and dig for more insight into it. If you choose one that matters enough to you, you will be entirely self-motivating for the research and even excited about doing it. Perhaps your choice of a topic will be easy, like the choice of Boma (“Mr. Misfortune”), an illiterate village “researcher,” in the following story:

Boma’s Burning Concern

Boma stooped to look closer at the redness on the belly of his prize ram, worried that it might be the start of the same disease that had mysteriously killed two of his other goats last week. Suddenly he heard screaming from the direction of his homestead nearby, and he ran to see what was going on.

“There it goes. Kill it! Kill it!” his wife was shouting. He looked where she was pointing just

⁴ If your heart is not really into your service and you are just doing it for money or because your supervisor has told you to, you will struggle with the Breakthrough process. It assumes that you care passionately about your service and that your concern drives you to pray about it all the time.

in time to see the tail of an enormous black mamba disappearing into the tall weeds that grew between their garden and the bush area beyond. With dusk falling, he knew he could not pursue the deadly snake into that brushy area.

“Did it bite anyone?” he asked breathlessly.

“No, but it was in the house. I saw it coming out the door when I came back from the well. Why was it in our house?”

Boma did not sleep that night. He tossed and turned and thought. He remembered that his daughter had been knocked down by a taxi as it left the bus stop three weeks before. It had only bumped her and she was not hurt badly, but he had wondered at the time whether the incident meant anything or not. Then the goats died. Now the snake. All night his mind went around in circles. The taxi, the goats, the snake. The taxi, the goats, the snake. How could he protect himself and his family? Which person or spirit was causing all these misfortunes, and why?

We do not usually think of illiterate villagers as researchers but in a sense they are. People like Boma routinely do many of the same things that good researchers do. One

of those things is choosing a topic that matters in the real world. Boma is not choosing a topic so he can do an assignment on it and earn a certificate. He feels he is not “choosing” at all. The topic has chosen him and forced itself on him. Now he wants to get insight into it so he can fight it and his family can avoid harm.

What challenges in your ministry are you praying about? What patterns have you noticed that you do not understand as well as you would like to? The following prayer exercise (Worksheet 2.1) should help you begin to choose one of them as the focus for your Breakthrough research. Here are three approaches to choose from:

- Study a problem that needs to be solved (like Boma did).
- Study something that is already working in your ministry. In that case you would do research about why it is working so you could multiply the current success.
- Study a need that your ministry is not addressing yet. You could evaluate the size and nature of the need so your ministry may decide whether or how to get involved in it.

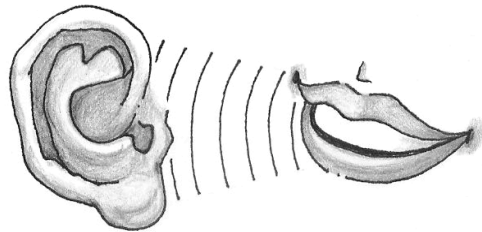
Worksheet 2.1: Your Prayer List about Your Church or Organization

Pray by yourself for ten minutes about the health and ministry of your church or organization, especially about anything good or bad that is happening repeatedly for reasons you do not fully understand. As the Lord brings things to your mind, jot them down under one of the headings below. Do not try to fill up the whole sheet. You may end up with only two or three lines filled in, and they may all be under one of the five headings. That is fine. Just write as God guides your thoughts.

1. A part of your mission statement that you keep falling short of; an aim you believe in but are not accomplishing very well:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

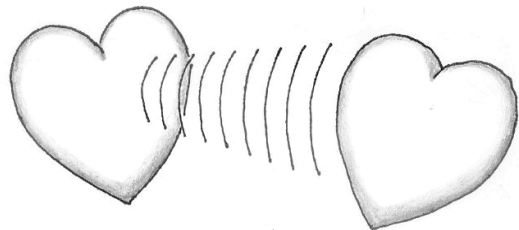
2. A program that is not meeting the goals you have for it, perhaps a new program that is not working well yet or an old program that used to work but does not work any more:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
3. A change in the community or situation that presents an opportunity or challenge for something you have not done before:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
4. Something that is working well and you want to know why so you can expand it:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
5. Something you want to check to see how well it is working:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
6. Some other concern: [DANGER: Beware of general problems that are too big and complex to tackle in a small research project like yours. For example, topics like "Poverty in this community," or "Lack of spiritual life in our congregation" are important concerns but they are not suitable for first-time researchers. They will give you many headaches. Be more specific.]
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

The Breakthrough process starts with your prayer list because your breakthrough issue is always a matter of the heart. You will put your heart into the study of that issue. By the end of it, you will be talking to people passionately and persuasively about one or more breakthrough insights you have discovered.



"What comes from the mouth is heard by the ears. What comes from the heart is heard by the heart."

—Native American proverb



As you know from experience, a lot of classroom education has nothing to do with the heart. The education comes from the instructor's mouth and goes into the student's ears. But as you move toward your breakthrough, you speak from the heart, and others will hear with their hearts.

Besides choosing a topic he cared about with his whole heart, Boma was like a good researcher as he thought through his topic. He

did not just sit there and worry about it. Without realizing what he was doing, he very naturally turned his concern into what we call an "action question" and an "insight question." These questions gave him a basis to investigate the problem. If he had asked someone to write down his thoughts for him on a "Master Worksheet" like the one you will use, his sheet would have looked like this:

SAMPLE: Boma's "Master Worksheet"

1. CONCERN. An area where I/we need a breakthrough is: [state in eight words or less]

the many bad things happening in my home

2. OBSERVATION. This concern is on my mind because I have noticed that:

Within a short time, my daughter got injured, my goats died, and there was a mamba in our house.

3. PRAYER. My frequent prayer for a breakthrough in this area is that:

these things would stop.

4. ACTION QUESTION. I need to know what to do about this. The specific action question I need to resolve is:

How can I protect myself and my family?

5. INSIGHT QUESTION. As I try to answer my action question (# 4), I will first seek a better understanding of what is going on in the heads and hearts of the people in the situation I am concerned about. The thing I need to understand better is:

Which person or spirit is causing all these things, and why?

You will expand two or three of the items on your "prayer list" worksheet by using Master Worksheets like the sample above. This will allow you to compare your possible research topics with each other and choose the best one as the focus for your Breakthrough process. Before you do that, here is a preview of what it will mean to research whichever one you choose.

Your aim is that the LORD will transform your prayer about your chosen topic so it will bring you a breakthrough in that area.

How will that happen? If you get better at listening to him and to the people in your ministry situation, he rewards you with new insights into your situation. These new insights lead you to pray differently, work differently, and see ministry results that are different and better.

The main aim of this guide is *to help you improve your skills of listening to God and the people around you*. We listen to God through prayer and we listen to people through “research.” That scary word “research” is really nothing more than structured, systematic, humble listening. Or we could say it is the careful, patient watching that lets you see and understand what you could not see before. Even if you never thought you could do “research,” you can do this. Boma can research his situation and you can research yours.

God will bless you for your prayer and research, and why not? What greater sign of respect could we show him than listening to him carefully? What passion of ours could please him more than a passion to discover how we can serve him more fruitfully?

So let’s get to work with what you have in your hand – your experience, observations, concerns, and prayers. Choose two or three of the prayers you wrote on your worksheet 2.1, whichever ones the Lord is impressing on you the most. Using the Master Worksheets below, expand each of them like Boma did.

Even if you already know which prayer or issue should be the focus for your Breakthrough research work, it is probably worthwhile to do this short exercise with two or three items from your prayer list worksheet. Sometimes this way of comparing the issues brings people new insight and either clarifies their chosen issue or points them toward a different issue than they expected.

Master Worksheet I: Your First Possible Topic

1. CONCERN. An area where I/we need a ministry breakthrough is: *[state in eight words or less]*

Write your answer here . . .

More . . .

[MW-1A. Criteria for checking your research concern](#)

2. OBSERVATION. This area of concern or praise is on my mind because in my ministry I have noticed that:

Write your answer here . . .

More . . .

[MW-2A. Encouragement about your observation](#)

3. PRAYER. My prayer for a breakthrough in this area is that God would:

Write your answer here . . .

More . . .

[MW-3A. Evaluating your prayer](#)

4. ACTION QUESTION (“practical question”). I need to know what God wants me to do next about this part of my ministry. The specific action question I need to resolve is:

Note: Your action question may start with a phrase like, “Should we,” “How should we,” or “What could we.”

Write your action question here . . .

More . . .

MW-4A. What is an action question?

5. INSIGHT QUESTION (“big question” or “research question”). As I seek God’s guidance about my action question (# 4) I will also seek deeper insights into the behavior, views/thoughts, and/or motives of the people in the situation I am concerned about. The thing I need to understand better is . . .

Note: Your insight question may start with a phrase like, “What do people think,” “How can it be that,” “Why do,” or “Why don’t.” An insight question is a question about “them,” the people you are researching. An action question (above) is a question about you.

Remember that your insight question is the most important question you will write in the entire Breakthrough process. It will guide and shape your whole project. Write your insight question now.

More . . .

MW-5A. Behavior, views/thoughts, or motives – which does your insight question deal with?

MW-5B. Making the leap from your action question to your insight question

MW-5C. Master Worksheet 2: Your second possible topic (optional)

MW-5D. Master Worksheet 3: Your third possible topic (optional)

2.2 Checking with your in-house supervisor

One of the ways the Lord may guide you now and throughout the Breakthrough process is through a person we will call your “in-house supervisor.” Usually this will be the person you directly report to in your ministry organization.

You need to ask this person specifically if he/she is willing to 1) give you input on your choice of topic now, and 2) do five short progress checks with you during the Breakthrough process, using a simple worksheet as a guideline for your discussion.

More . . .

2.2.A If you are not doing ministry under a supervisor

Make it clear to your in-house supervisor that you are *not* expecting him/her to invest a lot of time in your project or know all the details. You are asking only for a quick occasional check, enough to notice any big weak spots in either the decisions you have made or the things you are planning to do in the next step.

The in-house supervisor’s participation is very important because he/she is the person who will probably have to approve the recommendations you will make after your research. You want that person to know about your Breakthrough process from the beginning, not to be caught off guard by your suggestions at the end. Getting caught off guard is one of the things that supervisors hate the most, and it almost never leads to a supervisor’s support for your recommendation.

Though your supervisor may not give you much input during the progress checks, giving him/her the *opportunity to comment* is still an important sign of your respect, and he/she is much more likely to approve your recommendation at the end. At the very least, doing progress checks will prevent your supervisor from saying at the end, “Oh, I wish I had known about this earlier. I could have told you that . . .” You never want to hear your supervisor finish that sentence.

Decision 2.2. Decide whom you should ask to serve as the in-house supervisor for your Breakthrough project, and see if he/she is willing. If so, agree on whether you will meet by phone, Skype, in person, or in some other way. Schedule your first meeting, which will come at the end of your work for this chapter. Decide about how long you expect to meet each time and whether you will send any written work for the supervisor to read before the meeting. If the person you invite is unable to take on the role, find another suitable person.

Suggested prayer: Lord, I thank you for my supervisor. Thank you for all the ways he/she has helped me in the past. Bless him/her for that. And grant him/her the wisdom, ideas, and spirit of encouragement that will help me along in the Breakthrough process.

More . . .

[2.2.B Option if you filled out two or three Master Worksheets](#)

[2.2.C Some tips on consulting others who may be affected by your choice of topic](#)

[2.2.D Some analytical guidelines if your choice of a topic is still difficult](#)

2.3 Writing your introductory case study

Now that you have decided which topic the Lord wants you to invest your effort into, you are ready to begin working with your insight question. This is question 5 on whichever Master Worksheet you have selected as your focus. It will guide everything else you do in the entire Breakthrough process.

Your aim for the entire project is to get people to do something about whatever new insights you will discover as you research your insight question. A first step in this direction is to let people know why you are doing the research at all. Why does it matter to you? Why should it matter to them? *You need to tell the story of your situation in a way that leads naturally to your insight question and shows why you care about this question.*

Researchers call this a *case study*,⁵ a story of a particular case or situation that someone is studying for a particular reason. You will create your case study by expanding whatever

⁵ As previously explained, *case study* is the first of the four required methods in the Breakthrough process. The other three are *interview* and *survey*, which you will use with your respondents, and *focus group*, which you will use with friends who are helping you decide what to do about your findings.

you wrote on line 2 of your Master Worksheet. That was a sentence or two about what you had observed in your ministry that caused you to get interested in this particular topic. Give more details now. Paint a picture of your situation so that someone who does not know it can imagine it with you. Follow the instructions below about organizing your case study.

More . . .

[2.3.A Sample case study 1 on decline of a youth fellowship](#)

[2.3.B Sample case study 2 on tensions among an organization's staff](#)

2.4 How to organize your case study

Your case study should be one to three pages long (400-1200 words), just long enough to give people the background they need to understand the question you are going to research later. (A “case study” may be very long, even an entire thesis, but in the Breakthrough process we are only using the term to describe a very short introductory document.)

Since your case study will be based entirely on past observations rather than what you now begin to investigate, it is actually a “reflection” more than a systematic “study,” but we are going to call it a “case study” anyway. In the Breakthrough process, a case study is simply a story about your observations on your situation in recent months. You tell the story to provide the necessary background for your insight question.

There are three acceptable ways to structure your case study:

- A problem-solving case study (see 2.4.1)
- “Appreciative inquiry” (a study of something that is working well, see 2.4.2)
- A study of a new need your ministry is not involved in yet (see 2.4.3)

Choose one of the above three types, whichever is most appropriate for the kind of topic you will research. Use the corresponding instructions below, and note that the additional instructions in the electronic supplement will make your writing much easier.

2.4.1 Structure for a “problem-solving” case study (understanding a ministry activity/program that is not working)

(Note: this is the most common option for Breakthrough projects). Organize your case study in three sections plus a conclusion as shown below. The story you tell in your case study should cover the following six things, which begin with A, E, I, O, U, and Y.

1	Activity & Environment	What did you do? (or what are you doing?) In what setting or situation did you do it?
2	Intention	What was supposed to happen when you did it?
3	Outcome & Unlikeness	What actually happened? How is the actual outcome unlike the intended outcome?
Conc.	Y (why?)	Why is the actual outcome happening?

More . . .

[2.4.1.A Additional instructions for a “problem-solving” case study](#)

2.4.2 Structure for a case study related to something working well in your ministry (“appreciative inquiry”)

Organize your case study in three sections plus a conclusion as shown below. The story you tell in your case study should cover the following six things, which you can remember easily because they begin with the vowels A, E, I, O, and U as shown in the table.

1	Activity & Environment	What did you do? (or what are you doing?) In what setting or situation did you do it?
2	Intention	What was supposed to happen when you did it?
3	Outcome	What actually happened? How fruitful was it?
Conc.	Understanding	Why is the actual outcome so good?

More . . .

[2.4.2.A Additional instructions for “appreciative inquiry”](#)

2.4.3 Structure for a case study related to a new need your ministry has not yet been addressing

If your topic is about a new opportunity for ministry that your organization or church has not done anything about yet, then your case study will obviously be focused on describing the need rather than evaluating a ministry activity. Structure your case study as follows.

1	Situation & need	What is the setting or situation? What is the need?
2	Vision	What improvements do you dream of?
Conc.	Understanding	(see options below)

More . . .

[2.4.3.A Additional instructions for a case study related to a new need](#)

2.5 Guidelines for progress checks with your in-house supervisor

Now that you have done your Master Worksheet and your case study, it is time to review your decisions with your in-house supervisor. You will meet with this person four more times during the Breakthrough process. Whenever you meet with him or her, keep these guidelines in mind:

1. Think of your supervisor as one of your friends and allies, not as an observer or critic. The reason you are discussing your progress is so that the organization of which you are both a part will be able to serve God better.
2. Do not overwhelm your supervisor with detail. Do not ask for too much advice or for advice about things your supervisor expects you to decide for yourself. This puts your supervisor on the spot in an unhelpful way. Stick to the main points and let him/her ask for further explanation if desired. You may want to review

these guidelines for doing progress checks with your supervisor.

3. Do not insult your supervisor by acting as if your decisions are already set in concrete. Be genuinely open to your supervisor's input, even if it means you have to go back and do more work on something you thought was finished.
4. As you prepare for and carry out this check, keep asking yourself, "If I want my Breakthrough project to be such a positive thing for our organization that my supervisor will encourage more of this kind of research in the future, how will I handle this progress report?"

5. Always respect your supervisor's time. Set appointments for each progress meeting if necessary, and make every effort to keep those appointments. Be courteous if your supervisor needs to postpone a scheduled meeting.

Fill in the following worksheet to discuss during your first meeting. Be sure your supervisor knows that the main purposes of each progress check are, 1) to keep him/her informed and, 2) to give him/her an opportunity to comment on your decisions and plans.

Worksheet 2.5 Progress Check with In-house Supervisor

1. What you have provisionally decided

Let your supervisor read your Master Worksheet and your case study. Get his/her input on two main things:

- The issue you are proposing to research as your Breakthrough project
- The way you are describing the background of the issue

If your supervisor wants you to reconsider your issue or approach to it, that is what you need to do, even if it means changing to a completely different topic.

2. What you have been praying

Explain to your supervisor what you would like him/her to pray for you at this stage of the Breakthrough process. Mention that prayer is strongly emphasized in the Breakthrough process since it is meant to help people discern God's will in their ministry. You may want to show your supervisor a sample prayer or two in the guide.

3. What you have been reading

What are one or two of the most helpful insights, instructions or sections that you have read in this guide, Robson, or other sources so far? Summarize or quote them very briefly, just enough so your supervisor can see how your thinking is being influenced.

4. What you expect to do next

Explain that your next step in the Breakthrough process is to make some guesses (hypotheses) about the answer to the insight question at the end of your case study. These guesses will provide the structure for your research project. Invite your supervisor to give you any input he/she wishes as you begin to make

your guesses. His/her experience with your issue may be helpful. However, do not press for an answer if he/she would rather wait to comment until your next progress check.

5. Planned date and time of next progress check (after ch. 4) _____

Articles in Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org)

- “Case Study”

Readings in Robson, *Real World Research*, 2nd ed.

Pages	Starting point (section or chapter title)	Notes and instructions
177-185	“Case Studies”	

A Blessing

Blessings on you. May the Lord who guided you in your topic choice also guide your project in the steps to come.

3. BRAINSTORMING AND GUESSING

Chapter contents:

3.0 Introduction

3.1 Making your first guesses

3.2 Reflecting on your assumptions

3.3 Talking informally to a few key people

3.4 Library/Internet research

3.5 Writing a “forecast” of your research findings

3.0 Introduction

Boma Brainstorms His Insight Question

Sleepless Boma had to find an answer to his insight question. Which person or spirit was causing all these misfortunes, and why? He started thinking of every possibility.

Had he offended an ancestral spirit? He did not think so. His grandmother had appeared in a dream about six months earlier, and they had made the traditional sacrifice to appease her spirit. Maybe his wife had had another bad dream recently and not told him about it because she knew they could not afford to sacrifice another animal right now. Or perhaps he had broken a taboo and made himself unclean and vulnerable. He could not remember doing any such thing.

Was someone using witchcraft against him? Had they buried some evil medicine on his property somewhere? Who would have done that? Who was harboring a grudge against him, and why? Could it be his cousin in the next homestead? One time last year he had refused to loan his cousin some money to help buy another cow. He

thought the cousin had gotten over it by now, but maybe not. Or was it the widow in the house on the other side? Maybe she was so jealous of his wife that she was bringing down curses on the whole family. Or was it someone else?

Boma is once again an example of a good researcher. He is dreaming up all the possible explanations for the misfortunes that have struck him. In researcher’s terms, he is *forming hypotheses about his insight question*, and he knows exactly why he is doing this. He is trying to discover where the problems are coming from so he can defend himself.

If Boma did not form hypotheses, he would not know where to start looking. He would have to research every person in his village and every square inch of his property. It would be impossible. He has to make some guesses to get started, and he is able to make guesses because he has a lot of experience with his neighbors. He is not like an outsider who arrived yesterday.

If he had been using a Master Worksheet, items 5 and 6 would have looked like this:

Boma's "Master Worksheet" (cont.)

5. INSIGHT QUESTION. As I try to answer my action question (# 4), I will also seek deeper insights into the behavior, views/thoughts, and/or motives of the people in the situation I am concerned about. The thing I need to understand better is:

Which person or spirit is causing all these things, and why?

6. HYPOTHESIS. Some possible answers to my insight question (# 5) are:

It could be an offended ancestral spirit, a broken taboo, an angry cousin nearby, the jealous widow next door, or someone/something else.

3.1 Making your first guesses

We do not make the same kind of guesses Boma did because we are not looking for one specific person or power to blame for everything, but we do form questions in our minds when things go badly in our ministry or when new opportunities come up. And we, like Boma, have enough experience to make some guesses.

Here is the crucial point. Our task, like Boma's, is to take three steps in our thinking: 1) from the concern to an action question, 2) from an action question to an insight question, and 3) from an insight question to guesses of possible explanations. The first two steps are complete. Now we make our guesses.

The way we make our guesses can either put us into good position for a breakthrough or make it almost certain we will not get one. Your guesses will guide the rest of your Breakthrough process. For example, they will point you toward the questions you need to ask your respondents. If you guess that people are dropping out of your program for reasons X, Y, and Z, you have to ask them some questions about X, Y, and Z.

You need to be careful with your guesses because they also will limit your field of vision. For example, if you guess X, Y, and

Z but the real reason is A or B, you may miss it because you never guessed it and never asked any questions about it. It is like deciding in which sections of a forest you will search for a lost little boy as a blizzard is approaching. If he is not in any of the sections you choose, he will freeze to death before you find him.

Do not despair. Wrong guesses can sometimes lead to discoveries of things you did not guess. You may strike gold while you are mining for copper! How that works will be explained later, but be forewarned. It only works if you are humble enough to admit that your guesses might be wrong. If you think your job as a researcher is to prove that all your guesses are right, or if you would feel ashamed if any guess turned out to be wrong, you are going into your research in a biased way.

Be unbiased. Make your guesses, make them as well as you can, but *hold them lightly*. Allow your data to bring you more insight than you have. Let foolish pride take a beating. Your value as a person should be measured by the amount of insight you have at the end of the research, not by the accuracy of the guesses you made at the beginning. (This is an important point which will be discussed again while you are doing your "forecast.")

During your Breakthrough project you will probably only have time to research three or four hypotheses. As you brainstorm you may list more than that, even six or eight or ten, but then try to shorten your list to the best three or four. As you make your list, keep asking yourself one question, “Which guesses (hypotheses) are the ones that are likely to put me onto the path that will lead to the most insights?”

This list is a first draft, so do not spend too long on it or get too attached to it. You will refine it through four exercises later in this chapter. For the time being, consider it to be a cloudy vision, like the blind man in Mark 8 after Jesus touched him. He could see people, “like trees walking.” Like him, you already see some things but you need a second touch from Jesus, and that is what you are praying to get by working through the rest of the Breakthrough process.



“I see people, but they look like trees walking.” (Mk. 8:24)

Suggested prayer: Lord, please give me that second touch. I need to see my situation a lot more clearly than I can see it now. Please show me how to design a research strategy that will allow my heart and mind to see 20/20 for a change.

Think of your research concern as a mountain valley and yourself as a photographer. Your hypotheses are like vantage points from which you can take photos. Each one gives you a different angle on the valley, but you cannot see the whole valley from any one place. Suppose you only have time to shoot from three or four vantage points. The better you choose the points, the better your pictures will show others what the whole valley is like.

Worksheet 3.1 Hypotheses

HYPOTHESES. Some possible answers to my insight question (# 5) are:

Your answers (list 3 or 4 of the most likely ones):

-
-
-
-

More . . .

[3.1.A Criteria for your hypotheses](#)

[3.1.B Example from Albania – forming and using hypotheses](#)

[3.1.C Words to avoid in your hypotheses](#)

The following four exercises will help you decide whether to make any adjustments to your list of hypotheses, that is, whether to choose any different vantage points than

you have on your list now. The exercises are: reflecting on your assumptions, talking informally to a few key people, doing a little library/Internet research, and writing a “forecast” of your report.

3.2 Reflecting on your assumptions

Look at Boma’s assumptions. He is strictly a “Door 1 or 2” researcher. Within Boma’s traditional worldview, he believed that there had to be one personal cause of his troubles, whether a human being or a spirit. Either he had offended a good power and was getting punishment he deserved (Door 1) or he was under attack from an evil power (Door 2). He was researching to identify the person or spirit so he could counteract the power being used against him. In other words, he is doing the kind of research a detective does, seeking the person(s) who committed the crime.

It never occurred to Boma that the real problem might lie behind Door 3, that is, it could be only a coincidence that the taxi driver was drunk, the goats had caught a new disease from imported livestock, and the snake had followed the scent of a mouse into the house. The way he posed his insight question (“Who/what is causing all these bad things?”) guaranteed that he would never discover a Door 3 solution.

Boma ignored Door 3 because he assumed that everything behind Door 3 is only a symptom, and his problem would never be solved if he did not get behind the symptom to the cause. For example, he would not start a campaign against drunk driving (a “symptom”). He believed that if there were no drunk drivers on the road, the offended power (Door 1) or the evil power (Door 2) would bring harm to his daughter in some

other way, such as falling from a tree or being attacked by a crocodile. In other words, the “cause” of his trouble would accomplish its purpose by using some other method or “symptom.”

The point of the next exercise is to see whether you can become any more aware of your assumptions than Boma was of his. Will you be able to see how your assumptions are affecting the way you have stated your insight question and the ways you are guessing about the answer to it?

More . . .

[3.2.A Example from India](#)

I am not saying you should try to eliminate all your assumptions. Some assumptions are necessary for any research to get started in the first place. For example, a researcher studying HIV transmission may safely assume that everyone believes Aids is a serious problem. It would be ridiculous to spend twenty pages of a thesis proving such a safe assumption.

The only way to tell your safe assumptions from your dangerous ones is to become conscious of as many assumptions as you can. Robson (173) has a superb checklist for recognizing the many ways that assumptions can creep into a research process and cause bias in the research. The following worksheet will help you work on some of the main dangers in that checklist.

This exercise may be the most difficult one in the whole guide. Almost nothing is harder than digging deep enough to discover your own assumptions and biases. If you go through Worksheet 3.2 easily and quickly, start again from the top. You were not realistic.

Suggested prayer: Merciful Lord, open my eyes through this exercise. Let me see my biases more clearly than before, but please don't kill me by showing me how biased I really

am. I don't think I could take that all at once. Show me as much as you know I can handle, and lead me on toward the breakthrough you have for me.

Worksheet 3.2 Recognizing Your Assumptions

1. What is your insight question?
2. What do you assume your research will reveal as the answer to this insight question?
3. What do you assume other people already believe is the answer to this insight question?
4. What does this insight question assume about the people and/or the situation you are looking at? (This could be one assumption or several—what they know, what they are doing, what their motives are, etc.)
5. What does this insight question assume or imply about how things got the way they are?
6. What does this insight question assume about the kind of information you will need to gather in order to answer the question, and about your ability to gather it?
7. What possible answers does this insight question exclude, assuming they are so unlikely it is not worth investigating them?
8. How do you assume people will respond once you write up your answer to the insight question?

3.3 Talking informally to a few key people

One of the best ways to check and refine your hypotheses is to talk them over with friends. You may do this before, during, or after you have checked the library and the Internet (see 3.4). Discussion with friends is useful in many situations, but it is especially so if you are planning to research a widely accepted view that you think may be inaccurate.

More . . .

[3.3.A Example](#)

You already have one friend involved, your in-house supervisor. Your next progress check with him/her is not scheduled until the end of chapter 4, but if it is convenient for you and him/her, you might want to get together now while you are brainstorming.

It has been said that everyone in ministry needs a “Paul” (a veteran in whom to confide), a “Silas” (a close friend who is a peer), and a

“Timothy” (a younger person as an assistant and understudy).⁶ If you already know who those people are in your life, talk to all three of them about the Breakthrough process you are entering. If you do not know who they are, try to identify them. Use the Breakthrough project as a way of cultivating three key relationships that will be valuable to you long after the project is over.

Besides the three friends above, you may want to talk your guesses over with one or two others who have some experience that relates to the concern you are going to research. Maybe they are facing the same thing or have faced some version of it in the past. Maybe they have studied it. Maybe they have connections with other people who can help you dig into it. Maybe you can send a short e-mail to a list, such as a regional or continental list of staff of your organization, informing people of your topic and asking if anyone has worked on it before or read anything especially helpful. Do not be discouraged if no one replies. That often happens; nevertheless it is worth a quick check if you have access to an e-mail list.

Suggested prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you that I do not have to be a loner. Thank you for the people you have brought into my life over the years. Now please help me choose the ones you want to help me pursue this breakthrough. Thank you for the guidance. Please bless these people and make them a blessing to me.

⁶ Various versions of this idea of a three-friend network are in wide usage. Some use Jonathan or Barnabas instead of Silas.

Worksheet 3.3 List of Friends and Allies

1. “Paul” _____
2. “Silas” _____
3. “Timothy” _____
4. Other _____
5. Other _____

Make it your deliberate aim that whatever else may or may not happen during the Breakthrough process, you will be closer to every person on this list by the end of it. Thank God for every one of them, and if you know them well enough, urge them to keep praying for you all the way through the Breakthrough process.

DANGER: Do not allow the “Paul” figure to dictate what you will find. As a more experienced person, your “Paul” may have strong views about the subject you are investigating. You have to find a way to show respect for Paul yet be true to the data you will gather even if it does not confirm his view. One way to do this is to avoid directly asking Paul what he thinks your research will show. You simply keep him informed of what you are doing.

If you are using this guide in a classroom setting, you may have a study partner assigned to you. This will probably be a “Silas” type of person, that is, a peer in your ministry situation. First-time researchers often miss the value of such a person as a sounding board for their ideas and an encourager when things get difficult. Unfortunately I have still not found a way to convince them. No matter what I say, no matter what I write, they still neglect it. This is one of the most discouraging things in my experience as a research coach—watching researchers struggle and sometimes give up

their whole project because they never cultivated their connection with an assigned study partner.

3.4 Library/Internet research

Since the Breakthrough process focuses on field research, the use you need to make of library research is relatively small; however, it should be strategic. In some cases it can greatly help you form your hypotheses.

Do not jump straight into your own field research as if no one had ever thought of your topic before. Check the library and Internet resources that are available to you but do this briefly and properly, as explained in the six points below (3.4.1-3.4.6). These may be familiar to you or they may be drastically different from your normal way of using a library.

3.4.1 Avoid the “cut and paste” approach

In much of the world, the normal undergraduate approach to writing term papers is the “cut and paste” approach. When people use this approach, the only question they have in mind is, “What else has been written about my topic?” The researcher finds a good phrase, sentence, or paragraph somewhere on the Internet, cuts it, and pastes it into his or her own paper.

For example, the researcher may be studying an issue in a particular region, so he or she finds an article giving basic statistics about the region and pastes a page of it into his or her report as an introduction. (When people do this without using quotations marks or saying where they cut it from, it is plagiarism.)

The researcher does this several times and the whole paper becomes a pile of quotations from several sources. The researcher thinks this is what is expected. The problem is that the researcher is thinking only of

impressing the teacher. This kind of “research” does not contribute to any breakthroughs in the real world, and neither the researcher nor the teacher expects it to.

You have bigger things in mind. Your Breakthrough process is aimed at insight that will make a difference in your ministry so do the kind of library and Internet research that will bring insight. Three of the basic methods are described below.

3.4.2 Three things to look for— a general theory, a parallel research project, and/or a quote

Instead of thinking only, “What else has been written about my topic?” let your thinking be shaped by the three things described in the next three sub-sections. If you look for these three things, your search is much more likely to be productive.

3.4.2.1 Look for a general theory that may apply somehow to your situation

General theories are often formed in Western countries and exported to the rest of the world via textbooks, “development” policies, institutional structures, and other means. For example, the curriculum that is used to train pastors in England gets exported to shape pastoral training in Singapore or Sao Paolo. But much more research should be done about a general theory before it is applied in a different setting. The field is wide open for research projects that take a critical look at theories that come from the West.

Not all general theories are bad, even if they come from the West. For example, suppose you are trying to figure out what motivates change among people in the particular social group you minister to. You find a general theory of social change that claims the four key components are A, B, C, and D. You

could form one hypothesis around each component of the theory. Though your research may show that the general theory does not fit your situation at all points, it still provides a useful framework for you. It gives you a more balanced and comprehensive approach to your topic than you would have if you relied only on your own guesses about key components of social change.

Some general theories are formed from data drawn from several countries. For example, suppose you are trying to understand why a church-planting movement has been very successful in a particular region or people group near you. You find a book on church-planting movements that gives research data from 15 or 20 countries. The book proposes the general theory that there are ten common characteristics of successful movements. By looking at the list of ten characteristics, you might decide to focus your field study on two or three that seem to be important in your situation, or you could decide to check all ten briefly in order to see how well the general pattern applies to your context.

3.4.2.2 Look for a research project that somehow parallels your project

It is usually easier to find a general theory that relates to your project than it is to find a parallel research project where someone has studied a particular situation like yours. Nevertheless, you should try to find a parallel project because if you can find one, it is usually more valuable for you than a general theory is.

If possible, find a parallel research project done in a similar situation to yours. For example, if you are in India and you are going to study divorce among Christian couples, it will not help you much if you find a research project on divorce among Christian

couples in England. Marriages in these two situations are not similar enough.

Suppose you find a book or article that presents research on women's views of marriage breakdowns in your country. The author did research on 300 women but she did not say anything about the religious beliefs of the women in her sample group. You know that only 20 or 30 percent of the women in your country are Christians, but you do not know whether the researcher's sample had that percentage.

You wonder whether the marriage problems of Christian women are the same as the non-Christian majority so you decide to find out. You take some of the same issues and perhaps some of the same questions from the parallel research project but you only talk to Christian women about them. Then you compare your findings with the larger study which touched on your insight question but did not answer it.

Suppose you are a pastor in a community with a lot of violent crime. Your insight question might be, "How are churches in this city evaluating and responding to the increase of violent crime?" You may have discovered an article about the response of churches to rising crime in another city or perhaps in a country near yours. You decide to do a similar study to see if the churches in your country are responding in the same ways.

Or you may find a local newspaper article that describes the rising crime in your city. You could use the statistics in the article to help you decide what questions to ask. For example, if the article says that armed robbery is the fastest-growing crime, you can ask your respondents how it is affecting their neighborhood.

3.4.2.3 Look for a quote to use as a springboard

Whether or not you found a general theory and/or a parallel research project, you hopefully can at least find a good quote to use as a springboard for your project. This quote indicates that you are not the first person in the world who has ever thought about your insight question. Someone else has already recognized that it is important.

You may find something in a speech of a prominent individual, a recommendation at the end of a dissertation, or an editorial in a magazine or newspaper that is calling for a particular kind of research and/or a particular kind of change. You may use that in the introduction of your report to justify your work. For example, you might say, "The Minister of Agriculture recently said such-and-such. My research was designed to contribute to further thinking and discussion in this area that the Minister has called attention to. Something needs to be done, but what will it be?"

Or you might find a statement from a book. "In his book on such-and-such, Dr. X makes this shocking statement: [quote the statement]. If this is true, our churches are failing badly. My research is designed to see how accurately or inaccurately Dr. X's statement describes our community [or denomination]."

Using such a quote as a springboard for your project is very similar to using the "cut and paste" method that you are supposed to avoid, but it is acceptable because it is done with a specific purpose and only done once. By itself, one quote does not show adequate use of library resources, so be sure to look for the other two things described in the previous two sub-sections.

3.4.3 Tips on searching the library and the Internet

Since there is so much variation in the library facilities available to researchers who will use this guide in various countries, it is not possible to say much that will apply to everybody. The best approach is to check with your own librarian. If your library is large, ask for a "reference librarian" to help you get started.

If you are very unfamiliar with library usage, the following worksheet may help you introduce your topic to a librarian. It is best to print the worksheet, fill it out in the library as you begin checking things, and then take it with you either to show the librarian or to refer to as you speak to him or her.

More . . .

[Worksheet 3.4.3: Introducing Your Topic to a Reference Librarian](#)

As with library facilities, Internet access and experience varies widely among Breakthrough researchers in various countries. If you are already familiar with Internet searching, use the skills you have. If you have little or no experience in Internet research, here are a few tips to get you started.

More . . .

[3.4.3.A Search engines](#)

[3.4.3.B Directories and databases](#)

[3.4.3.C Online courses and materials about Internet research](#)

[3.4.3.D Printed textbooks about Internet usage](#)

As you begin using any of the above Internet resources, be aware that the Internet can be a gold mine for researchers, but it can also be

a quicksand pit. It can suck the inexperienced researcher down into endless, fruitless searches. Know when to quit.

In addition, be careful which information you believe. It is very easy for anyone to publish any opinion or “fact” on the Internet. For example, a web site with a vague but official sounding name like “Teachers for Education” might be a tiny group of people that is pretending it is a large group or it might be a very biased group (either very traditionalist or very anti-tradition). (This is just an illustration. I did not find any association by that name on the Internet at the time of this writing.) Be careful which web sites you trust and quote.

3.4.4 How much searching is “enough”?

The “Oops” Test is a useful measuring stick once you get the idea of how it works. Suppose you complete your research report and show it to the president of your organization. He says, “How are your findings different from the ones in the research that Ms. So-and-so did for us three or four years ago?” *Oops*. You have to admit that you do not know anything about her report. The president will be wondering what kind of researcher you are if you overlooked something that even a little effort would have found.

Or you may show your completed report to a friend who says, “Oh, my cousin just completed his doctorate at the university on this topic. What did you think of his work?” *Oops*. You never checked to see if any work had been done.

Sometimes the discussion with your friends (3.3 above) will lead you to any obvious studies you should know about. But do not trust your friends alone. Do some additional

checking online and in any library you have access to. You do not have time in this project to do a complete check, but try to do enough of a check to avoid the “Oops” situation at the end of your work.

3.5 Writing a “forecast” of your research findings

The next exercise may seem a little strange, but stick with me. I want you to pretend that your field research is already done and you are about to write up your research report, explaining the evidence your fieldwork produced concerning your insight question and your hypotheses. What do you think your report will say? A “forecast” is a three or four paragraph answer to that question. It does not go so far as to propose practical solutions, the way your actual research report will. It simply reports your findings and your analysis of the situation. (Later you will do this for real in the “Insights” section of your report.)

More . . .

[3.5.A Example from Albania—how to write a forecast](#)

Of course, the forecast is all guesswork, but it accomplishes two purposes anyway. First, it raises some of your subconscious assumptions to a conscious level, where they are less likely to bias your work. Second, it guides you as you plan your strategy and prepare your field questions. Anything in the forecast will need to be covered somehow in your strategy and questionnaires. For example, if you forecast that all the women in your sample group will have such-and-such a view on your topic, you obviously have to include a question about that in the questionnaire that you use with the women.

Note that a forecast can make you aware of your assumptions and guide you about what questions to ask even if the forecast itself is not very accurate. So be brave. Like any weatherman, make the best forecast you can with the information you have at the moment, but be willing to admit that your forecast may be wrong. No one expects it to be perfect. If you could correctly forecast everything about your research from the start, would you need to do the research at all?

More . . .

3.5.B If you are using this guide without a trained supervisor

One final point: the real report you write later may say things like, "Though the hypotheses did not suggest it, the field research revealed that such-and-such is a major factor in this situation." You obviously cannot put these unexpected "such-and-such" things into your forecast because you cannot see them yet. You can only hope to stumble onto them along the way. For example, Boma has not guessed that a new disease is killing everybody's goats, not just his, but he may find that out almost accidentally while he is checking out his own theories.

Worksheet 3.5 Forecast

Note: This "forecast" is only a steppingstone to keep you moving forward from your hypotheses to your field questions. Its value will become obvious later when you write those questions.

The insight question guiding my research was . . .

My sample group included ___ respondents for interview and ___ for survey. (Briefly describe where and how you conducted the fieldwork.)

Concerning my first hypothesis, I found that . . .

Concerning my second hypothesis, I found that . . .

Concerning my third hypothesis, I found that . . .

Concerning my fourth hypothesis, I found that . . . (omit this if you only had three hypotheses)

My main conclusion is . . .

An unresolved question in my research is . . . (omit this if necessary)

Congratulations! You have completed the first phase of the Breakthrough process. You know what you will research and why you will research it. You have identified your insight question and framed it with your hypotheses. You have checked the views of scholars and friends concerning your topic. And you may have begun to see how new insight on this topic would enable you to serve more fruitfully.

Suggested prayer: Thank you, Lord, for bringing me to yourself and for putting me into the place of service where I am. Thank you for the opportunity to enter the Breakthrough process and for carrying me this far. Thank you for friends who helped me refine my thoughts and sharpen my focus. And thank you that you are so faithful. I am trusting you to take me the rest of the way. Without you I can do nothing.

Online resources

- See section 3.4.3 above, including its sub-headings in the electronic supplement, for several suggestions of resources in Wikipedia and elsewhere.

Readings in Robson, *Real World Research*, 2nd ed.

Pages	Starting point (section or chapter title)	Notes and instructions
45-47	"Introduction"	More about fixed and flexible approaches to research design.
47-50	"Deciding on the Focus"	
50-54	"Researching the Background"	On checking the library and Internet before you begin.
56	"Box 3.4"	Good and bad starting points for choosing a research topic.
56-61	"Developing the Research Questions"	Robson here uses the term "research questions" to refer to the main question(s) being researched, not the questions researchers asks their respondents. Robson's "research question" means the same thing as "insight question" in the Breakthrough guide.
61-65	"The Place of Theory"	Discussion of various opinions for and against the use of "theory," that is, the use of hypotheses. (The Breakthrough process assumes you will use hypotheses.)
526-533	"Writing a Project Proposal"	Though you are currently doing only a project instead of a formal proposal for your thesis or dissertation, some of Robson's comments may still be helpful to your thinking and writing.

A Blessing

Blessings on you. May the Lord who guided you in your topic choice also help you as you choose the hypotheses that will shape the rest of your work. May the friends, books, and articles you need jump out at you. May the Lord take all the camouflage away so you can find whatever he wants you to find as you prepare for your project.

4. GETTING YOUR STRATEGY RIGHT

Asking the right questions

to the right people in the right way

*in order to gather information that provides fresh insight
leading toward creative recommendations and actions
according to God's will and for his glory. (cf. Phil. 1:9-11)*

Chapter contents:

4.1 The right people

4.2 The right way

4.3 Progress check with in-house supervisor

4.1 The right people

4.1.1 The right individuals

You will obviously need to talk to the right people in order to get the insight you want, but who are the “right” people? They are listed in the box below:

More . . .

4.1.1.A The ones who can provide the most relevant information

4.1.1.B The ones who will be willing to talk to you honestly about your topic

4.1.1.C The ones who best represent the “population” you want to draw conclusions about

If your “population” is the staff of the organization you work for, and there are only 12 or 15 staff members, you can study the whole population. When the population is larger, such as a church congregation, you cannot survey or interview everyone. Therefore a representative sample group will be chosen for the study. You will claim at the end that whatever you have found out from the sample group is generally true of the whole population.

This is a crucial claim. Research is often challenged or rejected because critics say that the researcher’s sample group was improperly chosen and it does not truly represent the population.

More . . .

4.1.1.D Examples of poor choice of sample group

You will probably select either a “convenience sample” or a “judgment sample,” though in some cases you may prefer to use a “quota sample” or a “random sample.” Consider your options below.

A *convenience sample* is just what it says – it is chosen because the people are the ones the researcher can talk to most conveniently. Therefore the researcher will *not* claim that the sample group is necessarily representative of the whole population, though it is still worth studying.

More . . .

4.1.1.E Example from Hungary

With a *judgment sample*, a *quota sample*, or a *random sample*, you are trying to select a group that reasonably represents the whole population. For example, if the population you are researching is a particular congregation, do not survey only the men. The women's views may be different. If your population is the pastors in your denomination, do not choose only pastors in the capital city for your sample group. The views of pastors in rural areas are probably different. Similarly, if you choose a sample group of only pastors who have e-mail, or only those who are over 50 years old, or only those who are your personal friends, the responses will probably not be representative of all pastors in the population.

- In a *judgment sample*, you would choose a few urban pastors, a few rural ones, a few old ones, a few young ones, etc., trying for a generally representative mix based on your judgment of the make-up of the population.
- In a *quota sample*, you get more precise. You gather data on the population, such as, 40% urban, 60% rural, and you make sure your sample group has the same proportions.
- In a *random sample*, you find some completely random way of choosing your sample. Random samples are the standard approach in large research projects, and there are highly sophisticated and statistically precise ways of choosing them,⁷ but

a more basic, common sense approach is adequate for a Breakthrough project. For example, you could get a list of all members of a congregation and choose every fifth one or every tenth one. (Judgment samples are more common than random samples for Breakthrough researchers because they are usually working in familiar situations with small populations.)

4.1.2 The right number of people

If your population is all the pastors in your denomination, you obviously cannot have only two or three pastors in your sample group. You need a reasonably sized group, but what size is that? As a general rule, for small populations like a congregation or a small neighborhood, a sample of about one-third of the population is accepted as reasonable.

If one third is more than you can handle in the time frame of your project, take a smaller sample group and explain your choice in the "Methods" section of your research report. Admit that your findings are somewhat uncertain because of the limits of your project. The main things to avoid are: 1) claiming that your findings are more certain than they are, and 2) claiming they apply to a larger population than they do. For example, do not survey people in one village and draw conclusions about all 15 villages in the district. Stay more modest in your conclusions. The smaller your sample group, the more modest you need to be.

You will be interviewing some members of your sample group and doing a survey with others. As you do the worksheet below, think only of the total number of people you want in your sample group.

⁷ See Robson, *Real World Research*, 161-162, 239-241. The most commonly used computer software among advanced scholars in sociology and anthropology is SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The complexity is obvious on the opening page of the online book explaining how to install and use it. See http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Using_SPSS_and_P

ASW. Not recommended for or needed by the ordinary Breakthrough researcher.

You do not need to decide yet how many of them you will interview and how many you will survey.

Decision 4.1.2. Using the following worksheet, decide on the size and make-up of your sample groups for your interviews and survey.

Worksheet 4.1.2 Selecting Your Respondents

1. Write your insight question here:

2. When you write up your research report for your project, what “population” will you be describing, that is, what group will you claim your research findings represent, and how large is that group?

3. How large will your sample group be? How strongly will you claim that your sample group is large enough to represent the whole population?

4. You may use a “convenience sample,” a “judgment sample,” a “quota sample,” or a “random sample.” Which of the four approaches will give you the best chance to select the “right” people to talk to about your insight question? Why do you prefer this kind of sample?

5. When, where and how will you select a sample group, using the method you have just chosen? Mention any problems you expect along the way.

Suggested prayer: Dear Lord, please bring the right people into my sample group, people who really represent the ones I am trying to understand. Let them see the value of what I am doing. May they be willing to spend some time with me and confident enough to speak openly.

4.2 The right way

The right way to do research is to get permission from three directions – the power holders, the respondents, and the Master – and to use appropriate research methods.

4.2.1 Permission from power holders

Get permission from the appropriate power holders before you go very far with planning your research. If you cannot get permission, change your topic. Without permission at the beginning, you have very little hope of getting a breakthrough at the end. The results may even be disastrous, no matter how good your intentions are.

People in power are typically nervous about research on their organization or community unless they have either designed it or approved it. Do not be surprised by this and try not to blame them for it. It is quite understandable.

Power holders hate surprises and research often produces them. Power holders may fear that the research, even though well intended, may call attention to weaknesses in their organization. It may get people discussing subjects that the power holders do not want discussed. It may result in the researcher knowing their organization better than they know it themselves. If they have never benefited from research or done any research themselves, it is much easier for them to imagine how research could hurt them than help them.

Besides the power holders in your own organization, you may need permission from others such as leaders in the population you have chosen to study and/or in the group you hope your research will eventually influence. Some government officials may need to be informed, and in some cases government permission may be required. This, of course, can delay or cancel your research plans.

4.2.2 Permission from your respondents

Perhaps you are trying to help new graduates find jobs with large businesses in your country, so your insight question is, “What are the executives of large businesses looking for as they hire new graduates?” Big problem—how will you get an appointment to see the people you want to see? Perhaps if you were the chair of a university department and you were going to publish a book on the subject, they would talk to you. But as an ordinary researcher, you will not get even the time of day from company executives.

Perhaps you plan to do research in a community where you are an outsider. The insiders may not like you or trust you because

you are not one of them. How will you get permission to discuss your issue with them?

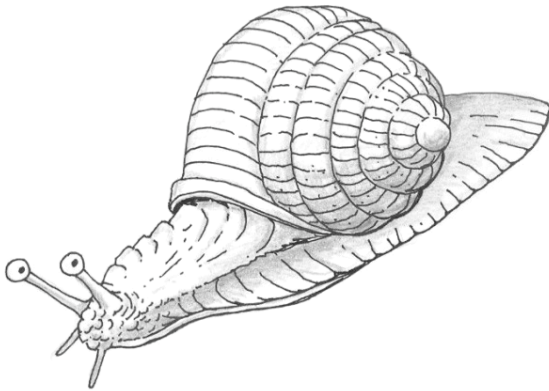
Even when you are an insider, people are busy and many are skeptical, especially when confronted with a new situation like a research interview. They may have all kinds of questions about the hidden motives of your research, whether you are looking for a certain kind of answer, who is paying you to do this, where the results will be used, who may be embarrassed by their answers, whether you are pretending to do research but actually trying to sell them something, etc. Even if the people know you already, they have never had you “research” them before. You have to win their confidence and cooperation.

When you are doing a survey, especially if it is short, your introduction may be very brief. For example, “Hello, I’m doing a survey as part of my school work. May I ask you a few questions?” When you are asking people to let you interview them for a half hour or an hour, your introduction becomes much more important. They may turn you down if they are not convinced.

Worksheet 4.2.2A Suspicious of Respondents

Think of the kind of people you will be interviewing. Write down at least three or four suspicious thoughts that could easily go through their heads when you approach them as a researcher and begin asking them about your topic.

-
-
-
-



The one who is patient will see the eyes of the snail—Ghanaian proverb

When a snail senses danger, it pulls its eyes back into its head. If you poke it, you will never get it to extend its eyes back out where you can see them. You must sit and wait.

When people are being studied, they are like snails. If you poke them too hard with all your “brilliant” questions, you will never find out what you really want to know. You have to be patient, let them sense that there is no danger, and then they will relax. You will see what the impatient researcher never gets to see.

In order to get people’s cooperation, you want to help them relax about the idea of being interviewed or doing a survey. A key part of this is the way you introduce yourself, your research and your motives. Your explanation *must* make sense to people. If it does not, they will invent an explanation on the basis of their suspicions, and you do not want to let that happen.

Say a little about yourself, but only as much as is appropriate. Briefly mention what you are researching, why it is important to you,

and why you think they will be able to help you. As you do so, be careful not to bias them in their answers.

You may say, “I am participating in a training program and one of my assignments is . . .” or “My church (or school, or mission organization) is trying to improve our service to the churches (or members, or community) here, so they asked me to see what people think about . . .” or “As an outsider (for example, if you are an urban person researching in a rural area or a person of one social group researching in a different group), I am trying to understand and learn from the Christians (or community) here. Can you help me on the subject of . . .” You might use any or all of these, adding or substituting whatever reasons will make sense to the people you interview.

DANGER: Don’t overdo it with too many details. If your explanation sounds too complicated, that makes people tense up instead of relax.

A big factor in your favor is that inviting people to cooperate in your research is actually a sign of respect. You value the person’s opinion. You are taking time to meet him or her and listen. You are going to take his or her answers seriously. Your respect should be obvious in the way you introduce yourself, and so should your gratitude for each person’s cooperation when you get it.

Worksheet 4.2.2B: Winning the Cooperation of Respondents

Write a realistic, winsome explanation in a few sentences that you will use to put your respondents at ease and persuade them to talk to you. Write it in the first person, exactly as you plan to say it.

Try to cover all the suspicions you listed in Worksheet 4.2.2A above, remembering that some suspicions are best handled indirectly. If you need different introductions for respondents with different suspicions, write them separately and mark which group they are designed for.

4.2.3 Permission from the Master

Like every other part of your life, your Breakthrough project needs to be done in the presence of Jesus the Messiah. He has promised to be with us always (Mt. 28:20) and that means we have to act like we would if he were here, because he *is* here. You have already asked his advice about your choice of topic, as if he were your research supervisor. Now consider his opinions about the proper way to go about your research.

His core principle is one not found in secular research manuals and not expected in academic circles. *You have to show love to the people you are interviewing.* We are under his orders to love everyone from our neighbors to our enemies, and all your respondents will be somewhere on that scale.

As noted above, listening to people is a sign of love and respect. Throughout your research activity, never turn people into things, mere “objects of research.” They are people, and they deserve to be loved as people, not used as things. They were doing something before you arrived to interview them and they will be doing something again after you leave. Keep that in mind and treat them accordingly.

Be gracious and grateful. Approach them courteously. Never pressure them or get impatient with them. Forgive them if they do not show up for a scheduled interview. Thank them sincerely if they do. You cannot

do research without their cooperation, and they are not forced to cooperate. If at all possible, offer them a later opportunity to see your research findings.

Never manipulate or deceive them. (Even the standard secular research manuals make this point about “research ethics.”) For example, do not tell them the interview will take five minutes when you know it will take twenty or twenty-five. Do not pretend you are gathering information for one purpose when you intend to use it for a different purpose. Do not try to influence them to answer in a particular way that will make you look good. Do not say their answers will be anonymous and betray them later. Do not secretly make a tape of their comments. Do not take advantage of them or use any of the information in a way that will harm them.

Remember that you are always representing the Master, even when you are going about your research. He absolutely does not grant you permission to represent him badly. If you do not even get his permission for your research, you will certainly not get his direction and his blessing, and where will you be without them?

4.2.4 Appropriate methods

Boma Chooses His Research Methods

By the end of his wakeful night, Boma knew several things he needed to do. He would ask his wife whether she had dreamed about any dead relatives who were asking her to pay respects by making a sacrifice. He would also keep racking his own brain to see if he could remember any taboos he might have broken without realizing it. He would go and tell his cousin about the snake, pretending just to warn him that one was nearby but actually checking to see if any hint of a smile

appeared on his cousin's face when he heard the news. He would deliberately wander close enough to the widow's home to see if she would greet him and what tone she would use. He would also keep watching the other people in his village to see if he could notice anyone who seemed to be upset with him or avoiding him.

Once again Boma is naturally doing what good researchers are trained to do, designing a comprehensive research strategy. If he diagrammed it, it might look like this:

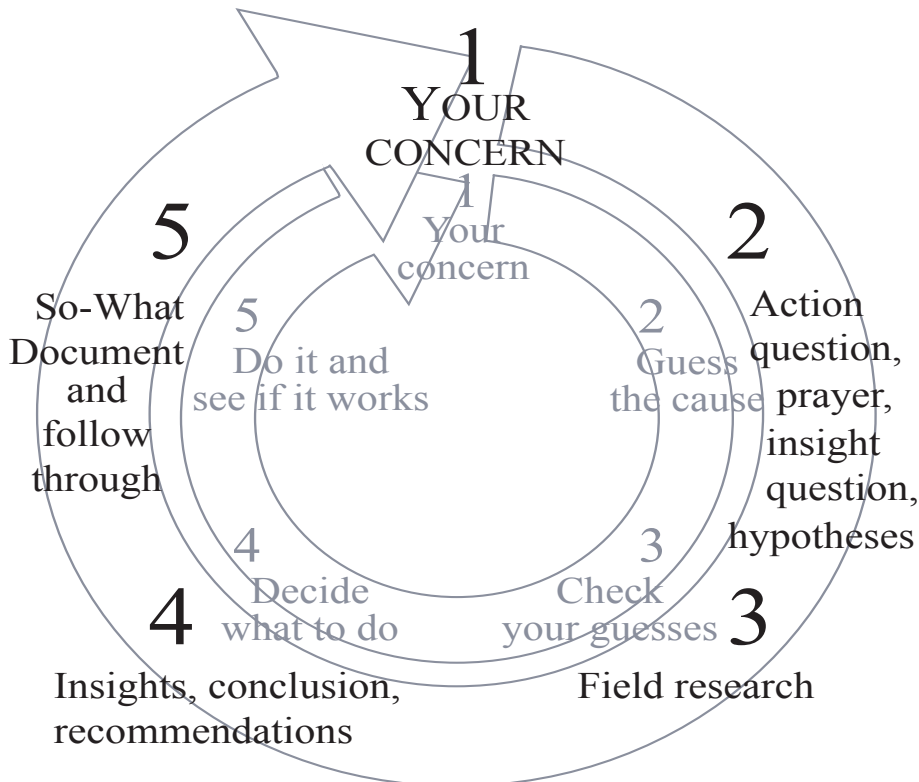
Note that Boma's homemade research strategy includes enough different methods to test all his hypotheses about who or what might be causing his problems. Besides asking himself questions about breaking taboos (reflection), his strategy includes asking his

wife a question (a bit like an interview), creating test situations with his cousin and the neighbor woman (experiments), and being especially watchful throughout the village (participant observation).

Boma did not think of his actions as "research," nor did he study any rules about research. For example, he was not getting anyone's permission and he was being secretive about his work.

The following diagram compares the formal and informal approaches. Like Boma, you have been using the informal one (the inner circle) for a long time. As you now take a more deliberate approach to designing your research, you are doing some of the same things Boma did naturally, but you will do them in a formal way.

Diagram 4.2.4 Formal and Informal Research Cycles



For example, Boma did not do any interviews or survey. Before you use those assigned methods, think of the reasons he did not trust them. Imagine that the story had gone like this:

Boma really wanted to find out where his troubles were coming from so he developed two sets of questions. One was for an interview of his wife about her dreams and the other was for a survey of his neighbors about their attitudes.

No, the story cannot go that way. Boma would never do that. He knows it would be ridiculous to take a survey of his neighbors in order to discover which one is using witchcraft against him! No one would admit it and everyone would get insulted and angry at him when he asked about it. And with his wife, he does not need to design five or ten questions for an “interview.” He simply needs to ask her if she dreamt about any relatives who have passed away, and whether they were asking for a sacrifice.

Interviews and surveys are not very useful on highly sensitive topics like Boma’s. Answers can easily mislead the researcher if any of the respondents have good reasons to hide anything. Other methods have to be found or the topic has to be changed to something less sensitive.

Survey is an inappropriate method for detective-style research like Boma’s. Police do not survey a community in order to solve a crime. They interview people and gather physical evidence. They are looking for one specific criminal in one specific incident, not for insight into a general pattern of behavior or thinking.

The survey method is introduced in the Breakthrough process because it is important and basic; however, we do not rely on it heavily because it is quite difficult to use correctly, and it works best with groups that are much larger than most Breakthrough

sample groups. In a survey everything depends on the wording of the question, which we will see in the next chapter is very tricky to get right. If used incorrectly, the survey method can easily mislead researchers.

By contrast, the interview method has some built-in safety nets. An interview allows the researcher to realize when a respondent is misinterpreting a question and to do something to clarify it. The interview method also allows for follow-up questions, such as, “Why do you say so?” or, “Could you say a little more about such-and-such? I’m not sure I understood you.” The risk of misinterpretation of data is much smaller with an interview than a survey. We will return to these interpretation issues after you have gathered your data.

As explained earlier, the two basic methods you are required to use in your fieldwork for the Breakthrough process are interview and survey, with interview being emphasized more. These two methods are very broadly applicable and should be appropriate for your setting. Talk to your instructor if you think either one is not appropriate in your case.

Besides introducing you to these two methods, the Breakthrough process also uses the case study method as background for your fieldwork and the focus group method as follow-up to your fieldwork. In future research projects you might decide to use the case study method and/or the focus group method to gather data during the fieldwork itself.

Many other methods may be equally appropriate or even more appropriate for your fieldwork. For example:

- *Experimentation* – measure something about your population, do an experiment that should affect the population, and measure the change.

- *Action research*—very similar to Breakthrough research in that you research your own situation and you do something about your findings, but “action research” puts more emphasis on involving your colleagues in designing the research and evaluating the findings.
- *Longitudinal research*—study the same group of people at intervals over a long period. Much medical research works this way, sometimes tracking thousands of people over a period of several years.

Some of these methods will include interviews, survey, etc., as part of their approach. If the Breakthrough process awakens a passion for research in you, there are many other research manuals that can fuel that passion. The most promising “next step” for most Breakthrough researchers would be Edgar J. Elliston, *Introduction to Missiological Research Design* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2011).

More . . .

[4.2.4.A Option for using research assistants](#)

Worksheet 4.3 Progress Check with In-house Supervisor

Note: If you asked your supervisor for input while you were developing your hypotheses, you may not want or need to do an additional progress check now. It depends how convenient or inconvenient it may be for your supervisor.

1. What you have provisionally decided

Let your supervisor read your Master Worksheet, including the guesses (hypotheses) you have added in question 6 since the last time he/she saw it. Let him/her read your “forecast” as well. Get his/her input on two main things:

- How realistic your guesses look
- How worthwhile it will be to spend your time researching these aspects of your issue

Assure your supervisor that you are not asking him/her to guess all the right answers for you. You are only wanting to give him/her an opportunity to comment while your thinking is developing. His/her perspective may keep you from wasting time on guesses that are not realistic or worthwhile, or it may add an additional guess or two you had not thought of.

2. What you have been praying

Explain to your supervisor what you would like him/her to pray for you at this stage of the Breakthrough process.

3. What you have been reading

What are one or two of the most helpful insights, instructions, or sections that you have read in this guide, Robson, or other sources during these steps? Summarize or quote them very briefly, just enough so your supervisor can see how your thinking is being influenced.

4. What you expect to do next

Explain that your next step in the Breakthrough process is to develop questions that will test your guesses (hypotheses). You will show your draft questions to your supervisor before you use them.

5. Planned date and time of next progress check (in the middle of ch. 6) _____

Articles in Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org)

- “Qualitative research” (also recommended for chapter 1)
- “Quantitative research” (also recommended for chapter 1)
- “Sample (statistics)” This is more technical than required for Breakthrough work. It does provide a glimpse of the wider field of sampling methods.

Readings in Robson, *Real World Research*, 2nd ed.

Pages	Starting point (section or chapter title)	Notes and instructions
65-76	“Ethical Considerations; Political Considerations”	
80-84	“A Framework for Research Design”	Very important. Relates research questions to purpose, theory, methods, and sample selection.
86-93	“Choosing a Research Strategy”	
100-109	“Establishing Trustworthiness in Fixed Design Research”	Explains validity, reliability and generalizability. Important also for Chapter 8 when you draw your conclusions, since you will be using a basically “fixed design” approach.
110-154	“Experimental Fixed Designs”	Most relevant part is 146-149, “Single Case Experiments.”
160-161	“Longitudinal Research”	Studying a situation over a long period of time.
161-162 with 239-241	“Sample Size in Fixed Design” and “Carrying out a Sample Survey”	
168-177	“Establishing Trustworthiness in Flexible Design Research”	Much relevant material, since you will be using some “flexible design” methods.
202-215	“Evaluation Research”	Research aimed to reveal how well, how and/or why a program works.
211-212	“Checklist for Planning an Evaluation”	
215-219	“Action Research”	The most important reading for this chapter. Your project will go through the first five of the eight steps on 218.
260-267	“Sampling in Surveys”	
Ch. 11, 309-345	“Observational Methods”	Most relevant part is 320-325, “Participant Observation.”

A Blessing

May Jesus grant you his second touch, making your vision even more clear and focused. May your strategy work better than you can ask or imagine. As you wade into the swamp of writing and rewriting questions, may the Lord keep your feet upon the rock and get you safely through.

5. PREPARING GREAT QUESTIONS

Asking the right questions

*to the right people in the right way
in order to gather information that provides fresh insight
leading toward creative recommendations and actions
according to God's will and for his glory. (cf. Phil. 1:9-11)*

Chapter contents:

5.0 Introduction

5.1 The right questions

5.2 Six types of field questions

5.3 Tips on breaking your insight question into smaller questions

5.4 Writing your questionnaires

5.5 Re-writing your questions

5.6 Passing a major milestone in the Breakthrough process

5.0 Introduction

We said at the beginning that you would not know what the *right questions* are until you decided what the *right question* is. That "right question" is the one you identified as your insight question. You then formed your hypotheses, wrote your forecast, and decided on your sample group. Now you are ready to decide exactly what to ask all these people. This is something Boma does not do.

Why Boma is not Designing Questions

As was mentioned earlier, Boma is doing *detective* research, looking for one specific person or power who is the source of all the bad things that are happening to him lately. He is not trying to understand any pattern of thinking in the village or to learn anything that will help him serve his neighbors better. All he wants to know is, "Who or

what is working against me?" It is ridiculous to ask any public questions about this.

Unlike many other parts of the Breakthrough research process, designing questions is not a natural skill that people use all the time. Boma framed his insight question and formed his hypotheses just like a highly trained researcher. He is good at observation and experimentation but he has no skill at all in designing questions to ask people systematically. It seems entirely unnatural to him.

We cannot use Boma as our guide at this point, and we should not be surprised if preparing questions for interviews and a survey is much harder for us to master than other research skills are. It is an unfamiliar skill, and it will take some practice to get good at it.

Whole books are devoted to the art of writing questions. Even experienced researchers struggle with this. There is no perfect, easy way, but there are some basic principles that will help you in the struggle. The first one is, “Do not assume that writing questions for a research interview is just as easy as asking people questions in an ordinary conversation.”

The wording of each question must be painstakingly chosen, and all the questions taken together must produce information that gives a complete picture of your topic from all relevant angles. Be prepared to write and re-write your field questions, to add some and throw others away. Your whole research project depends on the quality of your field questions, and the highest quality version of a question is almost never the first version you write down. That is why we say,

**Great questions are never written.
They are always re-written.**

The illustration below shows the process of improving a field question. If you ask, “Do you ever go to church?” your respondents will say, “Yes,” or “No.” That does not tell you much. However, if you change the field question slightly to, “How often do you go to church?” you get a lot more information.

~~“DO YOU EVER”~~

“HOW OFTEN DO YOU”

In this chapter you will learn a variety of ways to make your field questions great questions. Mediocre questions result in mediocre insights and mediocre breakthroughs. Your aim is to get beyond bland, mediocre, or even good questions and get into great questions that will tell you what you really want to know.

You will develop the two sets of field questions, one for your interviews and another for your survey. Some of the same questions may be used in both sets. All questions in both sets must measure up to the six “TEACUP” criteria explained in the next section.

More . . .

5.0.A Table showing the relationship of action question, insight question, and field questions

5.1 The right questions

Great questions for interviews and surveys have six characteristics, which give the acronym “TEACUP”:

1. Tolerable (not too threatening)
2. Essentially linked to your insight question
3. Answerable by the respondent
4. Clear to the respondent
5. Unbiased
6. Penetrating

These criteria operate like links in a chain. If any link breaks, the chain breaks.

5.1.1 Tolerable

An interview is much more stressful for the respondent than the interviewer, especially when a boss is interviewing his employees or a staff person is interviewing the people he/she serves. Reduce that stress. Though

you may have to ask some questions that are a bit threatening, try to keep the threat to a tolerable level. The more relaxed your respondents are, the better your chances to get the kind of insight you hope and pray for.

Unless absolutely necessary, avoid the “Big 3” threatening topics – money, sexual behavior, conflict. Avoid any other questions that may embarrass respondents or cause them to embarrass anyone else. If such questions must be asked at all, do it in the most delicate way possible and as late in the interview as possible, but not at the very end, as if you have at last revealed your “real” question.

More . . .

5.1.1.A Embarrassing the respondent

5.1.1.B Causing the respondent to embarrass someone else

5.1.1.C The “Big 3” threatening topics (money, sexual behavior, conflict)

5.1.2 Essentially linked to your insight question

As you begin writing the questions you will ask other people, always ask yourself, “*If my respondents answer this question the way I think they will, how much insight will that give me about my main question?*” That will keep you from drifting into interesting but non-essential matters.

Instead of just thinking generally about your insight question, look specifically at your hypotheses and your forecast. Ask yourself which hypothesis a particular question will help you prove or disprove. Sometimes a question may relate to more than one hypothesis, and once in a great while a question may not relate to any of the hypotheses even though it relates to the insight question. These are exceptions to the general principle of linking each question to one hypothesis.

Make sure to include questions about all aspects of your insight question. Each hypothesis and each statement in your forecast should be covered somewhere.

5.1.3 Answerable by the respondent

The questions need to be within the respondent’s sphere of knowledge or experience and phrased in ways that fit the respondent’s normal thought pattern. Otherwise the respondent will be intimidated and/or confused, and little insight will come. A respondent always has an easier time describing his/her experience than answering a question that requires some abstract analysis. For example, “How did you begin working with your current employer?” is easier to answer than, “What is the most important thing you look for in an employer before you agree to work for that company?”

A common temptation in questioning is to ask people your insight question directly. For example, “What causes such and such?” It is often too general or too complex for them to answer. They may never have thought about it. They imagine you are more likely to know the answer than they are, which makes them wonder why you are asking them at all unless you want to embarrass them.

A better approach is to ask smaller questions that are easier to answer. For example, instead of, “What causes resistance to participating in this project?” say, “Some of the project staff people thought the whole community would like this project because it does such-and-such. But now they are not sure if the people care about that or not. What do you think?”

Breaking your big question into powerful but answerable small questions is your challenge. Here are three characteristics of answerable questions:

More . . .

[5.1.3.A Within the respondent's sphere of knowledge or experience](#)

[5.1.3.B Within the respondent's normal thought pattern](#)

[5.1.3.C Specific enough for the respondent](#)

5.1.4 Clear to the respondent

It is easy to write questions that are clear to you, but the real test is whether or not they are clear *to your respondents*. Many researchers do not take this too seriously since they know that in an interview situation, they can always adjust and clarify questions as they go along. That helps in some cases but it is far from foolproof, and if it fails, the researcher may draw totally unreliable conclusions.

The big risk occurs when the respondent seems to understand the question and the researcher sees no need to clarify it. It is still possible that the respondent heard the question very differently than the researcher intended and assumed.

More . . .

[5.1.4.A Examples of unclear questions](#)

5.1.5 Unbiased

Some of the best insights come from the most unexpected responses, which is why you are required to rely mostly on open questions in your interviews. Questions must not limit the possible answers too much, they must not imply that the researcher is looking for a particular answer, and they must not make assumptions the respondent does not share.

More . . .

[5.1.5.A Trapping the respondent by limiting the answers too narrowly](#)

[5.1.5.B Exposing the desired answer](#)

[5.1.5.C Wrong assumptions](#)

5.1.6 Penetrating

This is closely related to two of the previous criteria ("essential" and "clear") yet slightly different. You want meaty, clever, insightful questions, not bland, superficial ones. Get your respondents to tell you their stories, to choose, to imagine, perhaps to think deeply (but not too deeply). Sections 5.3.2-5.3.6 provide some specific models and suggestions for structuring questions in penetrating ways.

More . . .

[5.1.6.A Examples of penetrating questions](#)

Worksheet 5.1.6: Warm-up Questions That Meet TEACUP Criteria

Insight question:

By now you probably have some ideas of some ways you could break down your big question into small questions to ask your sample group. As a warm-up exercise, write one question that would help you test each of your hypotheses. Do not spend too long on this. You will refine these questions and add others to

them later in the chapter. The point right now is only to begin practicing the TEACUP criteria-- *tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating*.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

5.2 Six types of field questions

Look back at the three or four questions you just wrote. Perhaps they all fall into "Type 1" below (5.2.1), which is the type that inexperienced researchers usually write. If so, expand your research skills. Get acquainted with the other five types of questions and learn to use them to your advantage.

5.2.1 Ordinary (basic) questions (mostly for interview)

These are short, straightforward questions such as, "Why do you think your church is growing so much faster than it was five or ten years ago?" That is a good question if the church is obviously growing faster, though it may be too big a question for some to answer (it calls for analysis and deduction on their part), and new people may not be able to answer it since they do not know what things were like five years ago at this church.

5.2.2 Multiple choice or Yes-No questions (for survey; may be used for interview if you use a follow-up question)

By the time you have asked 15 or 20 people why they think their church is growing, you will have trouble sorting their answers and deciding which answers came up most often. To get around this problem, you need some questions that call for precise, measurable answers. For example, "Which gospel do you enjoy most: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Not sure?" Everyone must give one of the five choices. Yes-No questions are even

more limited: "Was there a dream associated with your Christian conversion? Yes, No, Not sure."

5.2.3. Scaled (Agree-Disagree) questions (for survey; may be used for interview if you use a follow-up question)

Scales use numbers to rate things. For example, "On a scale of 5 with 5 being the highest, how interested are you in . . ." You might use two or three scales in a row, worded the same way, in order to test people's interest in two or three different things. For example, "How interested are you in the program as we are doing it now?" "How interested would you be if we changed to method A?" "How interested would you be if we changed to method B?"

A common type of scaled question is an "Agree-Disagree" question. It calls for a person to indicate his/her level of agreement or disagreement with a statement such as, "It is a good thing for women to be ordained." Like Yes-No questions above, Agree-Disagree questions should always have an "uncertain" or "don't know" option, usually in the middle of three or five options on the response scale. *Five options* are common for Agree-Disagree questions: strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, and strongly disagree. It is best to use *only three options* when a precise response on a scale of 5 would be very difficult. "How much impact do you think project X has had on the cooking habits of the women in the community: a lot, some, or very little?"

5.2.4 Personal story questions (for interview)

Often a quantifiable question can be followed up with a personal story question, such as, “What do you like about the gospel of Luke?” or, “Have you known any women who were ordained? If so, what did you think of them and their ministry?” Personal story questions can also be used alone.

Like the ordinary questions, story questions are easier for the respondent and harder for the researcher, who has to figure out how to keep the respondent on the subject, what to write down and how to interpret and report it (since stories do not directly produce statistics). Such open-ended questions are especially valuable because they usually put the respondent more at ease and they frequently produce surprising answers that open an entirely new perspective for the researcher.

5.2.5 “Suppose” questions (for interview, unless you include a multiple-choice answer)

These are hypothetical questions that describe a concrete situation and ask what the respondent would say or do in that situation or how they think the situation would turn out if it started the way you describe it. For example, “Suppose a Muslim says to you, ‘Allah and the God of the Bible are the same.’ How will you reply?”

“Suppose” questions can be much longer than this example, describing an entire situation and calling for a conclusion from the respondent. Sometimes several possible conclusions can be presented in a multiple-choice form.

“Suppose” questions reduce the threat of questions by allowing a person to give a general answer instead of a personal answer. For example, “Suppose that someone in our

church proposed that we have prayer meetings at the church every night for a month. How do you think most people would respond?” This is much less threatening than asking, “How often would you go?” or, “Do you think this is a good idea?” (Sometimes, however, it is all right to ask people for their own personal opinion on a “suppose” question. You have to decide for yourself when this is appropriate.)

“Suppose” questions have the same kinds of value as the personal story questions and they often turn out to be the most revealing questions of all. However, they carry an additional danger. When answering a suppose question, the respondent usually states only his/her conclusion and not the line of reasoning that led to it. The researcher must therefore be very cautious when guessing what the conclusion implies.

More . . .

[5.2.5.A Advantages of suppose questions in the global South](#)

5.2.6 Profile questions (for survey; may be used for interview or for selection of focus group members)

These have to do with profiling or classifying the people you are interviewing. Some of these questions can be answered by the researcher without asking the respondent. For example, in an interview the researcher knows if the respondent is male or female. Some profile questions must be asked at the beginning so the researcher can stop the interview if the respondent is the wrong person. For example, if you are researching church members, you must verify that your respondent is in fact a member before you proceed.

As noted in the “Tolerable” criterion above, if any of your profile questions are threatening to the respondent (such as, “What is your educational level?”), they should be asked toward the end of the interview rather than in the normal get-acquainted time at the beginning.

DANGER: Do not ask too many profile questions. Stick to the very few you really need. Profile questions are asked for only two reasons: 1) to make sure you are talking to the right people, and 2) to allow you to divide your sample group into sub-groups when you analyze your data. For Breakthrough projects the sample groups are usually too small for your data to be reliable if you try to break them down into too many sub-groups.

5.3 Tips on breaking your insight question into smaller questions

Think of your insight question as your big question. To create a questionnaire for the interviews, break your big question down into many smaller questions. Do not take the detective approach like Boma. Instead, take the “doctor” approach.

5.3.1 Think like a doctor

For example, a doctor’s “big question” is always, “What is wrong with this patient?” but doctors break that big question into many smaller questions like, “Do you have a fever?” “When did this start?” “Does it hurt when I press here?” etc. They figure out the answer to the big question by interpreting the answers to their many small questions. You do the same thing.

Your hypotheses will give you some ideas about what some of your smaller questions should be. Doctors always ask small questions according to their hypotheses. For example, if they think a patient may have

Aids, they ask, “Have you lost any weight in the last three months?” If the patient says, “Yes,” that does not prove Aids but it is a clue. Doctors continue with other small questions to prove or disprove their suspicions.

How many questions should you write? As many as a doctor should ask, that is, enough to get a good answer to the big question. As a general rule for this module, an interview may have five to 20 questions, depending on their size and complexity. A survey should have only five to 10. If that does not seem adequate, check with your instructor.

Be sure to use the various types of questions explained above. Don’t rely only on “ordinary” questions like an untrained researcher. You can do better.

5.3.2 Use a very broad question to relax people as you start out.

- I am doing research on such and such. How familiar are you with that situation (or project, issue, etc.) and how comfortable are you in talking to me about it?
- What is the first thing you think of when I say . . . ?
- What are one or two words that sum up your feelings about . . . ?

5.3.3 Use some open questions and some closed questions.

- Open questions allow the respondents to express their answer in their own words. Closed questions require them to choose one of the answers you offer to them.
- Open questions are qualitative; closed questions are quantitative, that is, you can turn the responses into numbers and percentages.
- Qualitative research is generally deeper but it produces “soft” data and the researcher can easily be accused of bias in interpretation. Quantitative research produces

“hard” (numeric) data but the researcher may not be sure what the numbers imply. A mixture of the two methods often is better than either one alone. Be sure you have some questions of each type.

5.3.4 Describe hypothetical or ambiguous situations and ask people about their view.

- “Out of 10 people who . . . , how many do you think would . . .”
- “Suppose you are at a meeting of your congregation (or your community or your organization). Someone makes the following proposal . . . How do you think most people will respond to that?” or, “What would you say to the group about that idea?”
- “Some people say . . . Other people say . . . How do you feel about those opinions? Is one any better than the other?” (Or, “Which opinion do you think most of your friends have on that subject? Why do they see it that way?”)

5.3.5 Follow up on something the person says.

- After a simple opening question like, “Have you ever . . .” or “When did you . . .” follow up with, “Tell me about it,” “Explain it to me,” or “You mentioned such and such. Can you say a little more about that?”
- After an Agree-Disagree question, usually with 3-5 response options, ask, “Why did you answer in that way?” or “May I ask why you think so?”
- After they tell you a story and give you their view on something, ask, “At what point in that story did you first realize that . . .” or “At what point did you start to feel the way you do now about . . .?”

5.3.6 Play dumb. (Actually it isn’t always playing.)

- After you explain something you are undecided about, ask, “Can you help me understand this?” or, “I am getting the impression from people’s answers to this question that they think . . . Is that the right impression or am I missing something? Can you help me?” (This works well if you are seen as an outsider by the people you are talking to.)
- “I am trying to figure out why . . . [your big question], but maybe I am making it all too difficult. Do you think there is an obvious answer to my question? What is really going on here? Can you help me get to the bottom of this issue?”

5.4 Writing your questionnaires

Use the following worksheet as you write your “small” questions. Note that your “small” questions are called “small” not because they are short or unimportant but because they are “small” parts that all add up to help you answer your “big” question (insight question). “Small” questions may be quite long, such as multiple choice and “suppose” questions.

After filling in your insight question and hypotheses below, write one possible question of each type listed. Then write as many other questions as you think you may need, using any types you prefer. Remember the TEACUP criteria—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, and penetrating*. You may re-use one or more of your questions from the warm-up exercise if they are good enough, or you may prefer to start from scratch.

For the time being, do not worry about the order of the questions. For example, it is not necessary to write an ordinary question

about your first hypothesis, a multiple choice question about your second one, etc., just because that is the way the types are listed on this form. That would be a very artificial and cumbersome approach. Use a more natural method and choose whatever type of question you want for each hypothesis. Just try to write at least one question somewhere about each of your hypotheses, and do not let too many of them be “ordinary” questions.

Suggested prayer: Lord, lead me to questions that will tell me what I really need to know in order to get into position for a breakthrough.

Show me the right combination of questions to use in order to see all the angles of this issue. Jesus, master questioner, please grant me some of your brilliant skill in asking questions that expose several layers of truth.

Decision 5.4. This is the largest and most difficult cluster of decisions you have to make in the Breakthrough process. What will your field questions be? How will they be different for your interviews and your survey?

Worksheet 5.4A Interview Questions (five to twenty)

My insight question (or “big question,” question 5 on my Master Worksheet) is:

My hypotheses are:

6A)

6B)

6C)

6D) (optional)

6E) (optional)

Small question 1: An ordinary question [answer here]

Which hypothesis on your Master Worksheet does this small question relate to? Mark all that apply: 6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E. (If it relates to none of them, either drop the question or explain how it will bring insight about your big question.)

If you think this question might not be as *tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, or penetrating* as it should be, mark or type the word that describes the problem area (“tolerable” etc.). Your coach or study partner may be able to help you improve the question.

Small question 2: A multiple-choice question (with follow-up)

Which hypothesis—6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E (or another reason)?

Any doubts—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating?*

Small question 3: A scaled question (with follow-up)

Which hypothesis—6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E (or another reason)?

Any doubts—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating?*

Small question 4: A personal story question

Which hypothesis—6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E (or another reason)?

Any doubts—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating?*

Small question 5: A suppose question

Which hypothesis—6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E (or another reason)?

Any doubts—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating?*

Small question 6: A profile question

Which hypothesis—6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E (or another reason)?

Any doubts—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating?*

Small question 7:

What type of question—ordinary, multiple-choice, scaled, story, suppose, or profile?

Which hypothesis—6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E (or another reason)?

Any doubts—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating?*

Small question 8:

What type of question—ordinary, multiple-choice, scaled, story, suppose, or profile?

Which hypothesis—6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E (or another reason)?

Any doubts—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating?*

Small question 9:

What type of question—ordinary, multiple-choice, scaled, story, suppose, or profile?

Which hypothesis—6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E (or another reason)?

Any doubts—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating?*

Note: If you will have more than ten questions, copy and paste the form for Small question 10 while it is still blank. The numbering should continue automatically. Create as much space as you need, but not more than 20 questions.

Small question 10:

What type of question—ordinary, multiple-choice, scaled, story, suppose, or profile?

Which hypothesis—6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E (or another reason)?

Any doubts—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating?*

Worksheet 5.4B Survey Questions (five to ten)

Write one possible question of each type indicated below as appropriate for surveys. Remember the TEA-CUP criteria. You may re-use one or more of the interview questions if they can easily be answered in a survey format, but omit the follow-up questions since they are usually open questions.

If you use ordinary questions in a survey, make them questions that can be answered in one word or a few words, never more than one sentence. Do not use story or suppose questions at all in a survey except for suppose questions that have a multiple-choice answer. Do not use the follow-up questions that were in the interview, since those also are open questions. These types of questions require too much writing.

My insight question (or “big question”) is: (cut and paste from Worksheet 5.3.6A. Include your hypotheses.)

My hypotheses are:

6A)

6B)

6C)

6D) (optional)

6E) (optional)

Small question 1: An ordinary question

Which hypothesis on your Master Worksheet does this small question relate to? Mark all that apply: 6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E. (If it relates to none of them, either drop the question or explain how it will bring insight about your big question.)

If you think this question might not be as *tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, or penetrating* as it should be, mark or type the word that describes the problem area (“tolerable” etc.). Your coach or study partner may be able to help you improve the question.

Small question 2: A multiple-choice question

Which hypothesis—6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E (or another reason)?

Any doubts—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating?*

Small question 3: A scaled question

Which hypothesis—6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E (or another reason)?

Any doubts—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating?*

Small question 4: A suppose question with multiple-choice answers

Which hypothesis—6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E (or another reason)?

Any doubts—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating?*

Note: If you will have more than five questions, copy and paste the form for small question 5 while it is still blank. Delete the word “profile,” since your additional questions will not be profile questions. The question numbering should continue automatically. Create as much space as you need, but not more than 10 questions.

Small question 5: A profile question

Which hypothesis—6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E (or another reason)?

Any doubts—*tolerable, essential, answerable, clear, unbiased, penetrating?*

More . . .

5.4B (A) Does a list of related questions count as one question or several?

5.4B (B) Does a question and a follow-up count as one question or two?

5.5 Re-writing Your Questions

Now that you have finished the excruciating task of writing all your questions, it is time to begin the even more excruciating task of rewriting. Remember, “Great questions are never written. They are always re-written.”

Rewriting involves first a thorough self-check, then (if possible in your case) a check with a study partner and/or a research coach, and finally a field test.

5.5.1 Self-checking

The reason for this extra self-check is that up till now you have been looking at your questions one at a time, asking yourself if each question meets all six criteria. It is easy for you to overlook some problems when you work that way. Now go back and catch some of those problems by rereading your list of questions six times. During each rereading, check for only one of the TEACUP criteria, using the guideline sheet below. For example, on the first reading, check only if every question is “Tolerable.”

More . . .

5.5.1.A May I skip the self-check?

Guidelines for the self-check of questions

1. Tolerable—Will this question make any of my respondents unduly nervous, even if that is not what I am trying to do? Will any of them think I ought not to be asking them this?
2. Essential—Is it absolutely necessary for me to ask this question in order to find the answer to my insight question? What do I expect to find out by asking it?
3. Answerable—Will any of my respondents feel overwhelmed by the question? Is it reasonable to expect them to be able to answer it?
4. Clear—Is there any way respondents could misunderstand or misinterpret this question? Will it be as clear to them as it is to me?
5. Unbiased—Are any dangerous assumptions built into this question? Will the respondents think they can please me by answering in a particular way?
6. Penetrating—Is this a deep, insightful question rather than a superficial question? Imagine how your respondents may answer, and decide if the likely answers will throw much light on your insight question. If everyone will answer the question in the same way, it is not penetrating.

Decision 5.5.1 Based on your self-checking, what changes will you make in your questions before you show them to your coach?

5.5.2 Checking with your study partner

If time permits, send all your draft questions to your study partner. Your study partner will probably have a better idea than your coach about how your respondents will answer the questions, which ones they may misinterpret, etc. Take his/her advice seriously. If your study partner fails to get back to you, skip this step and send your draft questions to your coach.

Decision 5.5.2 Based on your study partner's comments, what changes will you make in your questions before your first field test?

5.5.3 Checking with your coach or faculty supervisor

After making the changes from your self-check, send all your draft questions to your coach for review. This is the most crucial point in the whole Breakthrough process for your coach to give you input.

Decision 5.5.3 Based on your coach's comments, what changes will you make in your questions before you do your first field test?

DANGER: Do not suppose it is OK to do the above checks quickly or lightly now because you expect to have another chance during your field research weeks to fix your questions if you need to. That will be impossible.

For example, suppose you discover after the first half of your interviews that some people

are completely missing the point of one of your questions because they are interpreting one of the words differently than you intended. You might decide to rephrase the question to get rid of the problem word. If you do, you have to throw away the answers to the original form of the question. This complicates your record keeping, your calculations and your report. It is usually better to get rid of the whole question than to rewrite it at that stage of your field research, unless it is so crucial to your hypothesis that your whole project would collapse without it.

5.6 Passing a major milestone in the Breakthrough process

Congratulations! You are about to move from the planning phase to the “real world” phase of the Breakthrough process. This is a major milestone. For some people this is wonderful. They feel, “At last after all this tedious planning I get to DO something!” For other people it is daunting. They feel, “This is all too complicated. I knew research was too difficult for me. I haven’t done a perfect job of preparing my questions. I’m never going to get this right.”

More . . .

[5.6.A If you are lacking confidence about doing your fieldwork](#)

Whether you are optimistic or pessimistic about going out into the real world with your questions, keep one fact clearly in mind. Research is listening, and listening is very hard work. *Most of us habitually only half-listen. Breakthrough training is very largely training in how to listen, how to pay attention, how to see what is really there, how to sense what it means.* So get out there and LISTEN!!

Articles in Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org)

- "Questionnaire"
- "Questionnaire Construction"

Readings in Robson, *Real World Research*, 2nd ed.

Pages	Starting point (section or chapter title)	Notes and instructions
227-239	"Surveys and Questionnaires"	
241-254	"Designing the Questionnaire"	
245-246	"Checklist To Help Avoid Problems in Question Wording"	
Ch. 10, 292-308	"Tests and Scales"	Most relevant part is the description of the Likert Scale on 293-295. Our examples of "scaled" questions use Likert's approach.

A Blessing

Praise God that you made it through this difficult step in the Breakthrough process. Praise him for every single question you wrote and every one you were able to weed out. May his wisdom continue to guide you.

6. HUNTING AND GATHERING

Asking the right questions

to the right people in the right way

in order to gather information that provides fresh insight
leading toward creative recommendations and actions
according to God's will and for his glory. (cf. Phil. 1:9-11)

Chapter contents:

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6.1 Good interview and survey technique

6.2 Field test

6.3 Final planning for fieldwork

6.4 Get R.E.A.L. (discipline and accountability)

6.5 Stage 1: Start-up (first 25%, approx.)

6.6 Stage 2: Main research (about 50%)

6.7 Stage 3: Closure (about 25%)

6.0 Introduction

The whole point of your research project is to get new insight into your situation, and the way to insight is information. As it takes good building materials to make a good house, so it takes good information to make a good research report. You need to get information that tells you things you do not know or clarifies things you are not sure about.

The key to gathering information is to *know what you are looking for*, and you already know that. Your insight question, your hypotheses, and your forecast have guided you to prepare questions that will generate good, relevant information if you ask the right people, and you have chosen a sample group of the right people. Everything is

ready. Now you simply have to execute things well.

Gathering information skillfully depends on *good interview and survey technique, a field test, a three-stage strategy*, and perhaps most of all on *good discipline*.

One specific thing about information gathering creates the most problems for new researchers because it is so different from all the classroom and library work they have ever done. This problem area is scheduling. Field research is not like library research. You never have to schedule an appointment with a book. With a person, you do. Be forewarned. Your field research may be very frustrating for you if you wait till the last minute to schedule your interviews the same way you might wait to the last

minute to go to the library before a term paper is due.

6.1 Good interview and survey technique

6.1.1 A checklist of field interview skills

- Use your introduction to put people at ease. Don't scare the "snails."
- Think like a respondent. Try to get them interested in the questions rather than just going through the motions of answering. Watch for visual signs of discomfort. Encourage the respondent by saying things like, "That is a helpful perspective," or "That's fine. Let's go on to the next question" (but be careful not to do this in a way that influences the respondent's answers to later questions).
- Pray for the people you are interviewing. They are people, not mere "objects of research." If they are burdened or in a crisis, put your research aside for a while and help them even if your research suffers a bit. Also, ask your respondents to pray for you and your project, if they are praying people.
- Listen for all you are worth. Summarize fairly in your notes, always conscious of the danger of misinterpreting your respondents. Write down key phrases or words from your respondent that you can quote later.
- Beware not to bias the respondent by indicating you are looking for a particular answer. Read the questions exactly the same way to every respondent. If you explain a question, be careful not to explain it in a way that hints at a desired answer. Sometimes you might even say, "There is no particular 'right' answer to this; I just want your opinion."
- Be as unobtrusive about note-taking as possible. If it seems to be bothering a respondent, try to write less, or even for-

get about writing until the interview is over (if your memory can handle it, which you very well may be able to do at least on the "story" questions). As a general rule, avoid tape recorders.

- Number your respondents and put each respondent's number on the sheet(s) with their field notes. Date each sheet. Never put notes from two respondents onto the same sheet.
- Plan your interviews as strategically and efficiently as possible. Beware of squandering time on travel. If someone is late for an interview, spend the time praying for him or her, your other respondents, and your project.
- Don't kill yourself. Beware of scheduling too many interviews in a row. The intense concentration you need cannot be sustained for too long.
- Improve as you go along. Reflect on what goes well and what causes problems. Do not expect your first interview or two to go perfectly.

The above list is very basic. Robson has useful additional material on interview techniques and tips. See the reading list at the end of this chapter.

6.1.2 Notes on conducting surveys

- *General skills and principles.* Use the same skills listed above for interviews as far as these are relevant. Do not permit any respondent to see or overhear the answers that another respondent has given. Do not pretend that you want to ask "a few" questions and then ask 35 or 40.
- *"Natural" survey groups.* It saves a great deal of time and energy if you can survey a whole group that is gathered for some other purpose, such as a committee or staff meeting, a school class or a church

service. Be sure to get permission from the leaders and participants.

- *Short printed surveys.* Most Breakthrough projects use a very basic form of survey done on one sheet of paper, perhaps just one side of the sheet. We assume the respondent will fill out the sheet, though if the respondent is not literate, you may read the questions and record the answers. Surveys may also be done on the Internet, by e-mail, or by telephone, though these require some additional skills.
- *Collecting the forms.* If at all possible, collect the surveys on the spot. If you give people a survey to fill out (or send them one by e-mail) and ask them to return it later, many people will not return it. One reminder is usually OK if they do not. Two reminders may be OK in some cases, but no more than two. You have to settle for whatever percentage of responses you have received after two reminders. If there are not enough for a meaningful sample, you may need to invite additional people to do the survey until you have a usable number of responses.

- *Anonymity.* If you are promising the respondents that their answers will be anonymous, let them see this is true when they hand the survey in. This is easy if a group takes the survey together or if they return the surveys by mail. If you are surveying people one at a time and you believe anonymity is important to them, ask them to slide the completed survey form into your stack of survey forms that others have already completed. Note that e-mail surveys are never anonymous.

6.2 Field test

The goals of the field test are to improve the questionnaires and get you used to doing interviews and taking field notes. The field test often gives you a big reward for a fairly small time investment.

It may seem unnecessary because your questions look so well prepared, but you will never know how good they really are until you test them on other people. *In my experience I am not aware that I have ever coached a researcher who did not encounter some major surprises during the field test.* A researcher inevitably recognizes from the way people answer that certain questions need either to be improved or dropped.

Instructions	Notes and rationale
Field test your questions by asking them to just one person from your sample group. (Depending how the field test goes, you may want to do it with a second person later.)	This person should be someone you think will be fairly easy to interview. If your questions and your interview techniques don't work well with the "easy" people, you know you don't have a chance of success with the rest of the sample group.
Test both the interview questions and the survey questions with the same person. Do the interview first.	If any of the same questions are on both sets, tell the respondent to skip them on the survey.

As far as possible, do everything with the test person in exactly the way you plan to do it during the real research later. For the interviews, introduce yourself, ask the questions, and practice taking notes. Time the interview.	If the interview takes too long (or is too short), adjust your questions before you do the rest of your fieldwork. You may need to drop some in order to keep the interview to a reasonable length.
After you do the field test, change any questions that need improvement.	While you change them, remember the TEACUP criteria. Do not introduce new flaws into the questions while you are removing other flaws.
Also reread the checklist of field interview skills in light of your experience in the field test. Look for points where you can improve.	Perhaps there were things in the list that you overlooked or did not understand the first time, but now you can see how they will help you as you move into Stage 1 of your fieldwork.
Throw away the data from your field test, except the responses to any interview questions that you will keep exactly the same for the main part of your research. Throw away the answers to the survey entirely.	You are not allowed to use the responses from these practice sessions in your final report because the questions are not in their final form yet. You may not mix the responses you got from two versions of the same question. It causes confusion.

6.3 Final planning for fieldwork

Now that you have field tested your questions and timed your interviews, you are ready to finalize your field research plans. Like the field test, this step takes only a small amount of time but it often provides a huge payoff.

6.3.1 Planning your time and your group sizes

Your actual field research time for interviews and survey (excluding setting them up and traveling to them) should be only 10-20 percent of the total time you spend in the Breakthrough process. Of this fieldwork time, the interviews should take at least two thirds.

You decide how many interviews you will try to do in the time you have chosen. For example, if you had four hours (240 minutes) to do your interviews, you could do 10 interviews of about 24 minutes or 24

interviews of about 10 minutes. Of course, you could do other combinations as long as your total time added up to four hours.

You have to decide whether you can get more substantial and helpful data by going deeper with a lot of questions to a few people or by going wider with a few questions to a lot of people. Either approach may work well. It depends mostly on the kind of information you need to gather and the size of sample group you need to represent your population.

Remember that the more people you interview, the more complicated it is to find them, get their cooperation, make appointments (if necessary), travel to the interview, and wait for them to arrive (if they remember to come). This can turn into a lot of work. We recommend that you do at least five interviews even if they are very long, but not more than 25. A normal interview

length for a Breakthrough project would be 15 to 30 minutes.

The survey should take one third of your fieldwork time or less. It should be completed by at least 15 people but not more than 50. Remember that it will take you much longer to survey people one at a time than if you can work with them as a group, but sometimes you have no choice.

6.3.2 Planning for three stages of fieldwork

It would seem that the thing to do now is to plunge in, do all your interviews, and then sit down to reflect on your notes. That is a bad idea, almost guaranteed to cause two bad things to happen.

First, you will probably put off the interviews. Perhaps you are planning to do 20 of them but you do not get started until two days before you need them. You are figuring you can do 10 per day. But on the first day, some of the people do not show up, some come late, and you have trouble with transportation that takes up more time than you thought. You only manage to get four done that day, and only five on the next day. Now you are stuck with only nine interviews instead of the 20 you planned for, and you have no time left to fix the problem. If you break your work into stages, you give yourself three deadlines instead of one. If you are getting behind, you see that in the first stage and you have time to do something about it.

The other bad thing that happens if you do not divide your fieldwork into stages is that the information gradually blurs together in your mind. By the end of the process, what was said in the first few and the last few interviews may eclipse what was said in all the ones in between. Your memory becomes more accurate if you break your field research

into three stages and do a Fieldwork Summary Sheet after each stage. The three summary sheets provided below will aid your memory and give you a running start when you write up your research report. Previous Breakthrough participants have consistently found this to be a much bigger help than they expected.

As a general rule it is best to plan about one quarter of your fieldwork (or a little less) in the first stage, about half (or a little more) in the second stage, and about one quarter in the third stage. If possible, allow one week for each stage. That allows you to warm up in the first stage and make any adjustments you need in your questions or methods before you do the main part of your research. It also allows for some catch up work in the third stage if you run into any delays along the way.

The survey work may be done in any one of the stages or divided between them. If you do the survey work as the first stage, you can tally the results and use the interviews in stages 2 and 3 to help you understand your survey findings. On the other hand, if you do the survey work as the third stage, you can use it to check on things that came up during your interviews. Another option is to do the survey work and the interview work together throughout the stages and wait till the end to compare the findings from the two methods.

Breaking your work into stages is a useful skill to learn during your Breakthrough project especially if you are planning to do a full thesis later. The larger the project, the more important it is to break it into stages. Otherwise, as often happens, researchers lose momentum and finally abandon the project.

Decision 6.3.2 How many of your interviews will you do in each stage? In which stage(s) will your survey work be done?

6.3.3 Progress check with your in-house supervisor

Note: You meet with your supervisor now rather than at the end of the chapter because by then it will be too late for any input. All your plans will have been implemented.

Worksheet 6.3.3 Progress Check with In-house Supervisor

1. What you have provisionally decided

Show your supervisor the questions you propose to ask via interviews and survey. (If the two sets of questions overlap a lot, you may omit one set to avoid confusion.) Ask if your supervisor thinks these questions are OK to ask and likely to bring you some insight. Do not go into details about the changes you made to get the questions into their current form, and do not ask for line by line comments.

Briefly explain the following:

- How you will divide your field research time between interview and survey
- How many of your interviews you will do in each stage
- In which stage you will do the survey
- How you will introduce yourself to your respondents and get their cooperation

If your in-house supervisor wants you to reconsider any of your questions or plans, that is what to do, even if it means more work.

2. What you have been praying

Explain what you would like your supervisor to pray for you at this stage of the Breakthrough process.

3. What you have been reading

What are one or two of the most helpful insights, instructions or sections that you have read in this guide and any other sources since your last meeting with your supervisor? Summarize or quote them very briefly, just enough so your supervisor can see how your thinking is being influenced.

4. What you expect to do between now and your next meeting with your supervisor

Inform your supervisor of your planned deadlines for the following steps you will take before your next progress check:

Finish Stage One research

Finish Stage Two research

Finish Stage Three research

Submit your research report

Submit your "So-What Document"

5. Date and time of next progress check (after ch. 9) _____

6.4 Get R.E.A.L. (discipline and accountability)

Hopefully you have done a good job or even a great job choosing and framing your topic, then developing your strategy and questions around it. You have planned the three stages of your field research. But even a perfect research plan is no good in the hands of an undisciplined researcher. It will not succeed any better than a perfect golf club in the hands of a golfer with an undisciplined swing.

Most researchers who fail their research projects do not fail primarily because of a flaw in their research plan. They often think that is their big challenge and they concentrate all their energy on making a good plan, preparing good questions, etc. But in my experience *what usually kills first-time researchers is lack of realism and discipline*. They do not have enough self-discipline and they do not set up a good system with at least one other person holding them accountable and encouraging them.

They are like a country that fortifies its northern border very carefully, but when the war starts, they discover that the enemy is attacking from the east. They are defenseless on that side and they fall in defeat.

In order to defend yourself realistically on all sides, you need to take the four steps of “getting R.E.A.L.”

- Resist wishful thinking
- Establish your own deadlines
- Avoid distractions
- Love accountability

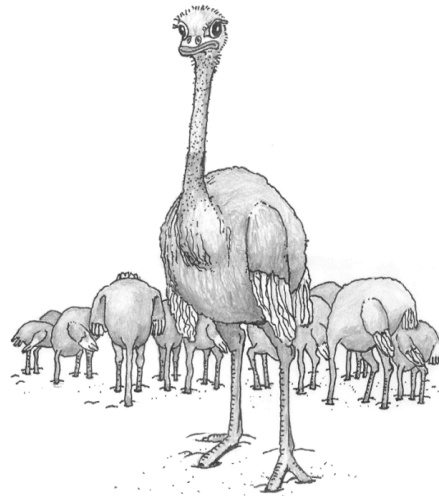
6.4.1 Resist wishful thinking

The key to a project that leads to a breakthrough is the ninth fruit of the Spirit – self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). We often think of self-

control as control of an evil appetite or emotion, but with respect to research, self-control means *a willingness to control our wishful thinking*.

As legend has it, the king of wishful thinkers is the ostrich. The ostrich supposedly hides its head in the sand when danger approaches, hoping the danger will go away or that perhaps the dangerous thing will not see the ostrich because the ostrich cannot see it.

After seeing what is involved in the Breakthrough research, you may be feeling a little like an ostrich. There are so many ways this thing could go wrong, so many dangers to guard against. You may want to just put your head down into your project, hoping that if you get busy enough, all the dangers will go away. If you are tempted in that direction, this line is for you:



Heads up! Get real!

You know perfectly well that an undisciplined project will fail. Face that fact. You also know that you cannot force self-control to grow. You have to welcome the Holy Spirit into your life and then, *voilà*, the fruit of the Spirit starts to show up. It is the gift of God, and your whole research project depends on it. So pray as hard as you research, or even harder.

Suggested prayer: *Come, Holy Spirit. Make me more like Jesus, who disciplined himself to stick to the mission the Father gave him. Work deep within me. Change what needs to be changed. Produce your fruit in me, especially the fruit of self-control. Give me the courage to face reality without the crutch of wishful thinking. Heal me of my lame ideas. You are my Strength and my Defender.*

As you do the next three parts of getting R.E.A.L., remember that a realistic plan has to be a fairly simple plan. Watch out for a plan that may look perfect on paper but is too complicated to work. Watch out for a plan that might work for someone else but will not work for a person like you. No wishful thinking!

If you don't get realistic now, you won't get a breakthrough later. You might as well abandon your project and throw this guide away. It is that serious.

More . . .

[6.4.1.A If you will be preparing a thesis based on your Breakthrough project](#)

6.4.2 Establish your own deadlines

Instructors always set deadlines for assignments. In a field research project do not be satisfied by focusing on those few deadlines set for you by someone else. Set some additional deadlines of your own in order to pace yourself properly throughout the work. Break the assignment down into steps, and set a deadline for each step. That way if you fall behind in your work, you will recognize it early enough to do something about it.

When they think only of the instructor's deadlines, beginning researchers often spend way too much time on the early parts of their fieldwork and writing. Then they end up rushing the later parts, which results in poor reports and few breakthroughs. Don't let this happen to you.

In the following worksheet, notice that there are nine deadlines, but usually only one of these is set by your instructor. It is the deadline for handing in the full report. The sheet shows you how to set eight other deadlines for yourself. If you can discipline yourself to focus on your eight deadlines one at a time, you will easily meet the one final deadline of your instructor.

Notice that the nine steps in your fieldwork and report writing are listed backwards on the worksheet. The final deadline is at the top rather than the bottom. It is easier to plan realistic deadlines that way, starting with the final one.

More . . .

[6.4.2.A If you are not doing your research as a course assignment](#)

Worksheet 6.4.2 Establishing Your Own Deadlines

Activity	Deadline date	Hours of work*
1. Research report finalized and submitted		
2. Feedback received from study partner (optional)		none
3. First draft of "hard parts" completed (optional: send to study partner)		
4. First draft of "easy parts" completed		
5. All survey answers tabulated		less than one
6. All notes from interviews reread and digested		one or two
7. Stage 3 fieldwork done		
8. Stage 2 fieldwork done		
9. Stage 1 fieldwork done		
10. Field test done and questions finalized		

Notes:

Line 1: The work of finalizing is to make any final improvements before submitting the report to your instructor. If your study partner has sent comments, take those into account. If not, you can usually make improvements yourself if you have not touched the report for several days after you finish the first draft (Line 3). You can return to it with fresh eyes.

Line 3: A Breakthrough research report is typically 8-15 pages long, 3000-6000 words. Think of how long it would take you to write a paper like that if you were doing library research. This will probably be about the same or slightly less. Note that a "first draft" is a complete draft. It should be as close to a final draft as you can make it.

Line 7: In all stages of the fieldwork, be sure to count your total time for all activities, such as setting up interviews and traveling to them, not just the actual time you spend sitting and interviewing people.

More . . .

[6.4.2.B Option for well-organized people](#)

Now that you have estimated your deadlines, look at *your work and personal schedule* for the weeks or months when your deadlines will come. Watch for any conflicts,

such as some travel you have to do, an annual budget deadline, or a big group of overseas visitors coming for a week. It is totally unrealistic to think you are going to

do much research under those conditions, so adjust your deadlines to allow for them.

As you begin your fieldwork, watch for things that are taking longer than expected. It helps if you keep track of your time the first few times you do something, for example, how long it takes you to set up your first five interviews and how much time you spent on travel and waiting. Keeping simple lists of time and activities will keep your prayers focused, help you adjust your plans realistically, and also give you reasons for praise as you meet your deadlines.

Don't forget to celebrate the small deadlines one at a time as you meet them. It is so much more energizing than worrying about the big deadline at the end.

Two opposite problems with time estimates confront two types of beginners in research. One type estimates that the project will take so much time that they may never be able to finish it. They get discouraged before they start, and they may let weeks go by before they can force themselves to do anything at all. For these people, the deadlines for the field test and Stage 1 are the most important ones in the list even though they may be the hardest to take seriously.

The other type of beginners makes an unrealistically low estimate of the time needed. Therefore they either postpone everything, assuming they can do it quickly at the end, or they plunge in with enthusiasm right away and get discouraged when things take a lot longer than they thought. They may skip things like the field test, which is a big mistake.

In addition to being realistic about time, you need to be realistic about money. Consider whether there are any costs involved in your research work that will be difficult to cover, for example, lost wages for time off work to write your research report, food/drink or another gift to thank your respondents, etc.

6.4.3 Avoid distractions

6.4.3.1 First line of defense

Some distractions are interesting ideas that will come up as you do your fieldwork. You will think of an extra question you could ask, a different aspect of your topic to explore, or a different perspective you could take on the whole project. If you are good at analyzing things (and I hope you are), you will have many distractions of this kind.

The best defense against such distractions is your insight question, expanded on Worksheet 6.4.3.1 into a short and simple summary of your main focus and why it matters to you. This worksheet will be the guiding point of reference for everything else you will do from here to your breakthrough. Put a copy somewhere that you will run into it all the time, perhaps on your desk, in your pocket or purse, next to your prayer list, or whatever works for you.

This is a very cheap insurance policy that will help protect you against distractions that can lead to disasters. If you lose focus on your worksheet at any time, your planning and execution will deteriorate. You will clutter up your project with work that is unnecessary, and at the same time you will overlook some of the things that really are essential.

Worksheet 6.4.3.1 Summary of Your Research Plan

1. What is your concern that is driving your entire Breakthrough project?
2. What impact are you praying that God will cause your research findings to have in the situation you are concerned about?
3. What is your insight question, that is, the central research question for your Breakthrough project?
4. Who will you ask about this insight question? Why are they the right people to talk to?
5. What are two or three of the main things you think you will find out about your insight question during the interviews and survey?

6.4.3.2 *Second line of defense*

Besides your summary sheet, you can establish a secondary line of defense against distractions of this kind. It is a file folder (whether electronic or paper). Label it, "Research Ideas for Prayer." When an interesting idea for research comes up that could distract you from your main focus, write it up using the worksheet below and put it into the file. Then you can relax. You have not lost the idea, but neither have you allowed it to interfere with the research you are doing now.

Do not take this idea lightly. Remember that the Breakthrough process is just as much about developing you as a new person as it is about helping you do one single

project. Keeping an active "research ideas for prayer" file is a key mark of the difference between the "old you" and the "new you." Listening to God includes listening to ideas for research topics that he puts into your head.

Soak the file with prayer from time to time. Perhaps look at it on a schedule every month or two. Talk to a friend or two about an idea when it comes to mind. Many of the ideas will not look as important after a few months and you can throw them away. Other ideas will look better and better as the Lord leads, but you do not give him a chance to lead you in this way if you do not create the file and keep putting things into it.

Worksheet 6.4.3.2 Research Ideas for Prayer

Date of the idea:

1. What the idea is:
2. How it came up and why I think it may have come from the Lord:
3. Why I think it might deserve research; what difference it might make for my/our ministry:

4. The first two or three people I could talk to about its possible significance or about researching it with me or for me:
5. What I would have to be convinced of before investing resources into researching this:
6. Notes on conversations, thoughts during prayers, library work, etc.:

6.4.3.3 *Unavoidable distractions*

If you are realistic, you know that some kinds of distractions will not leave you alone in spite of your two lines of defense. Things happen in your church or your family, and you cannot say, “I can’t deal with that right now. It does not relate to my insight question.” Nor can you put it into a file for future research. It must be dealt with now, and you are the only person who can deal with it.

When people go to a different country to study, they do not have these problems, but neither do they have the opportunity to do field research on their own situations. They are restricted to library research that often has hardly anything to do with their actual ministry. Accept the interruptions in normal life as the price you have to pay for the privilege of doing research in your normal place of ministry, and remember that *hardly any spouse or church member likes to be perceived or treated as a “distraction”!*

When your work has to be interrupted, discipline yourself to keep moving it forward by using small pieces of available time. Do not wait for the big blocks of time you wished or imagined you would use for your project. Did something disrupt the day or the evening you had set aside to work on your project this week? Don’t abandon the plan. Work during the part of the day or the part of the evening that you still have left. Are you falling behind your estimated schedule? Don’t wait till you are three or

four weeks behind. Check your planned schedule every week and do something about it before the delay gets too long.

Suggested prayer: Lord Jesus, thanks so much that I can do research in the real world where I serve and not only in a library far away from here. Grant me the self-control and self-discipline I need to cope with the everyday demands of my ministry while I keep pushing on with the Breakthrough process.

6.4.4 **Love accountability**

Researchers need to learn to love accountability and avoid distractions instead of giving in to the normal human tendency to do the opposite – avoid accountability and love distractions. You already have some good accountability built into your project through your progress checks with your in-house supervisor. You also may have a study partner if you are using this guide in the classroom.

Now you want to improve your accountability structure because your fieldwork and write-up are the places where you need accountability the most. As with the other realistic steps in this chapter, you want something very simple. You want to *identify one person who can be trusted to do one thing, hold you to the deadlines you have established*. This means they will keep track of your deadlines,

ask you about them, encourage you to meet them, cheer when you do, and speak up when you do not.

The person might be your study partner, if that person has been keeping in touch with you regularly since you started. If not, you may need to choose an additional person.

More . . .

6.4.4.A If your study partner is not responding to you or helping you

Decision 6.4.4 Which people will you ask to hold you accountable to the deadlines you will set below?

Set a schedule and discipline yourself to talk to (or e-mail) your partner on that schedule. One e-mail or phone call per week is a rough guideline. It might be only a minute or two, but making a very short phone call is much better than letting a week go by with no contact.

Send a copy of your deadlines to your study partner, and ask him/her for a copy of his/her deadlines if you do not already have them.

Think of your accountability partner as one of your best friends and supporters. Welcome their input, even if it hurts sometimes. Thank them for their criticism. If it leaves a bad taste in your mouth, think of it as health food. Being accountable to a friend can often make the difference between finishing a project and dropping out of it.

Remember that you and your partner are not being kind to each other if you do not encourage each other as well as talk honestly about the weaknesses you see in each other. Be gentle, but say what needs to be said. Otherwise you are being like the ostrich that

keeps its head down, pretending there is no danger, and then the danger can overtake you and your partner.

6.5 Stage I: Start-up (first 25%, approx.)

Boma Does His Fieldwork

That night Boma asked his wife if she had dreamt about any relatives. She insisted she had not, but he was not sure whether to believe her. They had just had a hard time borrowing enough money from several relatives for school fees so their daughter would not be dismissed for the term, and he knew his wife did not want them to borrow any more to pay for a sacrifice.

He had still not been able to think of any taboos he had broken. He told his cousin about the snake, and he could not detect any smile. He wandered past the widow's house a couple of times but there was no response. She was not home, did not see him, or did not want to see him. Nobody else in the village seemed to be acting nervous or strange when he approached them.

In spite of his best efforts, he did not seem to be getting any closer to finding out where the trouble was coming from. Had all his hypotheses been wrong, or had he talked to the guilty person without realizing which one it was? What else could he do to find out? And how long would it be before the next disaster struck?

During all your preparatory work so far in the Breakthrough process, you may have felt as if you were not making much progress. It seemed like it took a long time to develop your topic and your questions. Think of all that work as the preparation of a room for painting. You move the furniture out, you scrape old paint off, you sand, you tape around the edges of things, you cover the

floor, and when you have done all this, the room looks a lot worse than before!

As soon as you swipe the brush or roller on the wall the first time, you can suddenly start to see what the whole room will look like when it is done. Get ready to “swipe” with your questions during Stage 1. You are very likely to feel the surge of hope that all your hard work on the preparations is going to be worth it.

If possible, talk to your study partner about your field tests and your final changes to your questions. Pray for each other as you begin your fieldwork.

Suggested prayer: Pray about your interviews, before, during and after. Pray that the Lord will cause your respondents to make revealing comments, and that when they do, you will have ears to hear them. Bless the people who are cooperating with you. Thank God after the interview for any nuggets that you discovered.

After completing Stage 1 of your fieldwork as planned, fill in the “Fieldwork Summary Sheet” below. Write very briefly, just enough that you will be able to remember the context later when you are writing your report. Skip any items where there were no highlights during this stage.

Worksheet 6.5 Stage 1, Fieldwork Summary Sheet

Date(s) of Stage 1 Fieldwork:

Date of completion of this summary sheet:

Number of interviews during this stage:

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Two or three quotes or concepts that give useful insight concerning your insight question:
2. (Optional) Something that doesn't quite make sense yet but you want to pay special attention to it during Stages 2 and 3 of your fieldwork:
3. (Optional) Something that raised a new issue you might want to research at some future time. Mention it here and put a copy into your "Research Ideas for Prayer" file.

REFLECTIONS

Did you recognize any weaknesses in your questions? If so, which question(s) and what are you going to do about the problem(s)?

Did you recognize any weaknesses in your research strategy or skills? If so, what will you do differently in the next stage?

How confident are you that your research is basically on the right track and if you keep doing what you are doing, you will get some breakthrough insights? If your confidence is low, what adjustments will you make?

6.6 Stage 2: Main research (about 50%)

As you begin Stage 2, remember that as you cannot build a good house from poor building materials, so you cannot build a good research report from poor information. Pray for good material.

Suggested prayer: Dear Father, let this second round of fieldwork go even better than the first one. Help me see what you want me to see. Put me onto the path that will lead me to the insight that will bring me to a ministry breakthrough.

You are hoping that through your project God will work a miracle in the hearts of the people in your circle of influence. Don't forget that his first miracle may be in you rather than in them. He may open your eyes and ears first, and then enable you to open the eyes and ears of others.

Quick reminders for Stage 2 field research:

- Don't let your Summary Sheet from Stage 2 make you a biased listener. Be alert for hints and clues that show you might have misinterpreted something the first few

times you heard it. During Stages 2 and 3, listen twice as hard for things that go against your current line of thinking as for things that support it.

- Before doing Stage 2, you may want to talk to a friend about your Summary Sheet from Stage 1.

More . . .

[6.6.A Talking to a friend](#)

- Push yourself hard enough to complete as many interviews as planned for this stage. This is a *terrible* stage to let yourself slip behind schedule. That would put too much pressure on you in Stage 3, and the quality of your listening will go down.
- You may be tired, or you will be by the end of this stage if you try to do too many interviews in too short a time. Remember that when athletes get tired, they are more likely to injure themselves or to make a mental mistake that causes their team to lose the game. Be extra careful at this stage that your fatigue does not cause you to listen poorly or treat someone badly.

After completing your Stage 2 fieldwork, fill in another copy of the Fieldwork Summary Sheet.

Worksheet 6.6 Stage 2, Fieldwork Summary Sheet

Date(s) of Stage 2 Fieldwork _____

Date of completion of this summary sheet _____

Number of interviews during this stage _____

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Two or three quotes or concepts that give useful insight concerning your insight question:
2. (Optional) Something that doesn't quite make sense yet but you want to pay special attention to it during Stage 3 of your fieldwork:

- (Optional) Something that raised a new issue you might want to research at some future time. Mention it here and put a copy into your "Research Ideas for Prayer" file.

REFLECTIONS

- Did you recognize any weaknesses in your questions? If so, which question(s) and what are you going to do about the problem(s)?
- Did you recognize any weaknesses in your research strategy or skills? If so, what will you do differently in the next stage?
- How confident are you that your research is basically on the right track and if you keep doing what you are doing, you will get some breakthrough insights? If your confidence is low, what adjustments will you make?

6.7 Stage 3: Closure (about 25%)

As you bring your field research for your project to a close in Stage 3, stay open to your respondents. Hear what they say. Don't hear what they don't say. In the final stage of interviews, do not misinterpret things in ways that will confirm any false impressions you may have formed in Stages 1 and 2. You would be better off if you had never begun a research project at all than to end up in that trap.

When you started, you knew you did not know the answers. Now after two stages of fieldwork, you think you do know because you have asked questions and people have replied to you. But did they really say what

you thought you heard? This is a dangerous question. So put on your best "listening ears" and get out there for one final stage.

Suggested prayer: Lord, this is my last chance. What I do not hear by the end of this round of interviews will remain hidden from me while I am writing up my report and recommendations. Please show me anything I have missed so far. Correct any wrong impressions I have. And bless the people who are giving their time to help me.

After completing your Stage 3 fieldwork, fill in another copy of the Fieldwork Summary Sheet.

Worksheet 6.7 Stage 3, Fieldwork Summary Sheet

Date(s) of Stage 3 Fieldwork _____

Date of completion of this summary sheet _____

Number of interviews during this stage _____

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Two or three quotes or concepts that give useful insight concerning your insight question:
2. (Optional) Something that raised a new issue you might want to research at some future time. Mention it here and put a copy into your "[Research Ideas for Prayer](#)" file.

REFLECTIONS

3. Did you recognize any weaknesses in your questions? If so, which question(s) and how will that affect your use of the data? Will you have to throw out any data because you think it is not accurate?
4. Did you recognize any weaknesses in your research strategy or skills? If so, note them here and mention them in the "Methods" section of your research report.

CONCLUSION

5. Write down one or two of the main things you now know for sure about doing field research because of your experience in these three stages. Send this (or tell it) to your study partners. It may be a helpful tip for them as they begin work on the full theses.

Articles in Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org)

- "Structured Interview"

Readings in Robson, *Real World Research*, 2nd ed.

Pages	Starting point (section or chapter title)	Notes and instructions
269-273	"Introduction"	Introduction to types and uses of interviews.
273-277	"General Advice for Interviewers"	
277-283	"Carrying out Different Types of Interviews"	
290-291	"Skills in Interviewing"	

A Blessing

As the Lord is patient with you, may you be patient with the people you interview, and may he let you see the reward of that patience.

7. DRAWING INSIGHTS FROM INFORMATION

*Asking the right questions
to the right people in the right way
in order to gather information **that provides fresh insight**
leading toward creative recommendations and actions
according to God's will and for his glory. (cf. Phil. 1:9-11)*

Chapter contents:

7.0 Introduction

7.1 Outline for a Breakthrough research report

7.2 The easy parts of your report

7.3 The hard parts of your report

7.0 Introduction

Boma Gets Some Insight (Maybe)

All Boma's efforts to discover the cause of his many troubles had not given him any insights that would answer his question. Frustrated by his failure to identify the source of his problems, burning with suspicion of everyone, and increasingly fearful of what might strike him next, Boma caught a chicken and headed for the diviner's house at the other end of the village. Perhaps the diviner could get some insight into the situation.

The diviner talked to Boma for a while about his difficulties, then slaughtered the chicken to examine its internal organs. He puzzled over them for a few minutes. He did not seem to be getting any insight from them, and Boma was getting worried. Then suddenly he pointed at the left lung and said, "Look there. There it is. It is what I suspected when you were telling me about your situation." Boma couldn't see anything unusual and could not guess what the diviner

had been suspecting. He eagerly waited for him to explain whatever the evidence had told him.

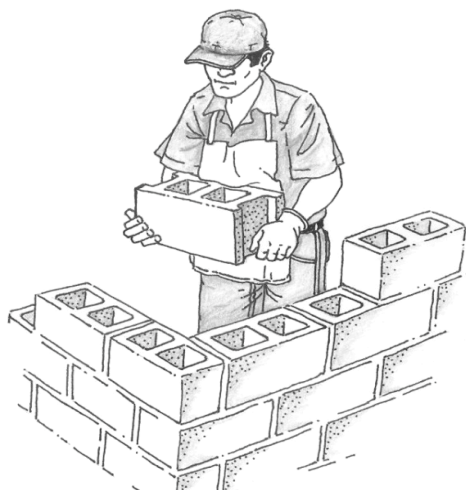
The data that the diviner observed was something unusual about the chicken's left lung. He claims he got some important insight from it, but he has not yet said what the insight is. Boma was not sure if his earlier comments had made the diviner suspect a particular person, since he already knew all Boma's relatives and neighbors. Or perhaps the person himself/herself had earlier come to the diviner to get medicine to use against Boma!

Boma did not ask the diviner what he had suspected or why he had suspected it, of course. He knew that diviners never reveal which people they have talked to or what the people have told them. The person who goes to a diviner has to trust whatever the diviner says about both the evidence and the interpretation.

The diviner's secretive approach to finding insight is a common one when people are looking behind Door 1 or Door 2, but it is absolutely unacceptable for a Door 3 insight. This does not bother the diviner since he is not even considering that the answer for Boma might be behind Door 3. He never looks there. But researchers do look there, and they know that whatever insights they find behind Door 3 must be explained publicly and analyzed logically. Do not expect your readers to trust your judgment as if you were a diviner with secret knowledge. You are not a diviner. You are a researcher, and you must present your evidence clearly to convince people with it in your research report.

So ask yourself, *"What have I observed during my research and what insights does it give me? What can I see about my situation that I could not see before?"* You gathered a lot of information from your respondents, but right now it is nothing but a pile of information. It is raw data.

You are like a house builder at your construction site. You have brought piles of building materials there, but right now they are only piles. No one wants to live among



them. They want a good builder to transform the piles into a house.

Your challenge is the builder's challenge. Your research report is the "house" you will build from your data. As you build, remember Ps. 127:1,

"If the Lord does not build a house, then those who build it work in vain."

Commit your work to him now.

Suggested prayer: Creator of heaven and earth, Architect of history, please guide me as I "build" a research report in your name. Grant me a sense of wisdom, beauty, and proportion as I turn my piles of data into a house that honors you.

7.1 Outline for a Breakthrough research report

If a house is going to have plumbing, electricity, and several rooms, builders will often use a blueprint to guide their work. It shows them the size and shape of the rooms, doors, windows, etc. On the next page is Table 7.1, the "blueprint" to follow as you build your report from your pile of data.

Don't be overwhelmed by seeing everything at once. The table is there only to help you preview the big picture of writing your report. The rest of chapter 7 and all of chapter 8 will guide you as you work on one section of your report at a time, starting with the easiest parts.

Table 7.1 Outline for Research Report

Section & size	Questions in the reader's mind that you will answer in this section	How you may start this section
<u>Title page</u>	What is this document? Is it worth opening?	<u>See sample title page</u>
<u>Introduction</u> (10% of report)	What is your research topic? Why does it matter to you or anyone else? What has already been written about it? What population are you describing?	The question I am seeking more insight about is, "[put your insight question here]"
<u>Methods</u> (10%)	In what way and for what aspect of your project did you use the required methods (case study, interviews, survey)? Where and when did you use these methods? Any problems? How much time and how many people were involved in your interviews and survey? How did you select your sample group? How confident are you that the methods produced reliable information? Is there anything you would do differently if you could do the research over? What was the role of prayer in your research?	In order to get more insight about this situation [or this issue], I went about my research in the following way:
<u>Insights</u> (40%)	As you did research about the insight question and the hypotheses on your Master Worksheet, what new insights emerged for you? What evidence led you to these insights?	My research revealed a number of things about <u>_____ [your topic] _____</u> . These can be grouped under these three or four headings:
<u>Conclusion</u> (10%)	What is the answer to your insight question? What do you think your insights mean when you put them all together?	The guiding question for my research was, " <u>_____ [restate your insight question] _____</u> ." My research shows that the answer to this question is . . .
<u>Recommend-ations</u> (10%)	If your conclusion is correct, what should be done about it? What adjustments do you recommend? Who should make these adjustments and how could they realistically make them? What else needs to be researched before or while these adjustments are made?	Now that we can see that " <u>_____ [summarize your conclusion] _____</u> ," we should consider the following actions [or changes]:
Appendices (20%) <u>App. A: Questionnaire and Responses (2-4pp.)</u> <u>App. B: Local Language Questionnaire (opt., 0-2pp.)</u> <u>App. C: Biographical Sketch (1/2p.)</u> Works Cited (only a few lines)	A. What questions did you ask? What responses did you get on closed questions? B. What were the questions in the local language? C. Who are you? What experiences may have influenced your view of this topic? Works Cited: Which sources did you mention in your report?	[no suggestions]

Notes on Table 7.1

1. First column. Click on the name of each section to get detailed instructions for that section.
2. First column. The percentages shown are only general guidelines for section lengths. You may adjust them slightly to suit your situation. Breakthrough reports are usually 8-15 pages long (3000-6000 words) including the required appendices.
3. First column. "Works Cited" is the last page in your report. It is not called "Appendix D." It has the title, "Works Cited." See section 8.4.C for details on how to cite your references.
4. Second column. These questions are repeated at the beginning of each section of the instructions below. They will help keep you on target as you write.
5. Third column. If the suggested sentences sound a little artificial to you, you are free to state the same ideas in a similar but more natural way. They are suggested only to help you get your words flowing.

Suggested prayer: Dear Lord, this writing project looks huge to me. Help me to get going on it and to stick with it. Please grant me some time to concentrate on this and on you. Keep my family and friends safe and healthy. No financial crises this week please, and don't let this be the time that I have trouble with a vehicle, a computer, a colleague or a landlord.

Write your report as instructed below. Be sure you have started with the "Easy Parts," covered all the required parts as described in Table 7.1, and kept each part to the suggested length.

In the rest of chapter 7 and all of chapter 8, it is advisable to read only one section of instructions, such as "7.2.1 Appendix A," and then to write that part of the report before you move on. Of course, you may preview the instructions for all the sections if you wish, but do not read them all, set the guide aside, and then begin writing your report.

7.2 The easy parts of your report

When they see the blueprint (the table outlining the whole report), many researchers assume they should write their reports by starting at the beginning and writing to the end. There is a much easier way.

Identify the easy parts and write those first. Then you will not flounder as you try to figure out how to get started. You will quickly make a strong start on your writing, since the "easy" parts total about 40% of your report. That will create some momentum that will help you later when you write the hard parts of the report, the remaining 60%.

The easy parts of your report are the parts you can write right now, even before you have drawn any conclusions from your data. There are six of these—title page, introduction, methods, and three appendices. It is easiest to write the appendices first, even though they come at the very end of your report.

7.2.1 Appendix A: Questionnaire and responses

You have already written the questionnaires for your interviews and survey. Put them

both into “Appendix A: Questionnaire and Responses,” exactly as you used them with your respondents (Exception: if you used them in a different language, put the English translation here.)

Put the interview questionnaire first, and use the title, “Interview Questionnaire.” List all the questions you used, but do not include any of the responses. You may quote some of the responses in the body of your report, but you simply take them from your field notes.

After the interview questionnaire, start a second section of Appendix A called “Survey Questionnaire.” This time you do include the responses. Show the percentage of the sample group that chose each possible response. If no one chose a particular response, enter 0% (or “None”) instead of leaving it blank. You will calculate these percentages according to the instructions below.

If your survey used any questions that the respondents answered in their own words, do not include all the things they wrote. (Exception: if you had them answer in only one or two words, you may include the responses.)

More . . .

[7.2.1.A Example—how to list one-word responses](#)

Calculating the data from your closed questions can be the most exciting part of the project. It is often the moment of a breakthrough discovery. This may be the moment when you get some new insight about your situation or when you finally can put a number onto a general idea that you suspected for a long time.

Enjoy the thrill of it—being the first person to know how your numbers are coming out

and the first one to start thinking about what they mean. This is one of the rewards that only researchers experience. It is as if you are driving over the crest of a hill or around a street corner and you can suddenly see a lot of things you could not see before. You may be overwhelmed and hardly know where to look. You may be awestruck. Or you may find more or less what you expected to find, confirming the impressions you had before the research.

Whether you are finding many new insights or only a few, you want to be sure that your insights are accurate. This means you must tally your data carefully and calculate your percentages correctly. Tally the number of responses to each option on each question (how many strongly agreed, how many agreed, how many uncertain, etc.) Then calculate the percentage equivalent for each kind of answer. List all your percentages with all your questions in Appendix A.

More . . .

[7.2.1.B If you used the same question on your survey and also in your interviews](#)

[7.2.1.C Example—reporting data from two separate sample groups](#)

[7.2.1.D How do I calculate a percentage and why do percentages matter?](#)

[7.2.1.E Should you tally your data with a calculator, a spreadsheet, or an online survey program?](#)

No matter which way you tally your data, be careful to maintain your own integrity and the integrity of the data. You worked hard to get your project this far. Don’t throw everything away by being careless with your tabulations. Do them yourself at a time when you are wide awake and free of distractions.

If you have anyone helping you tabulate, choose someone who is good with details. Carefully supervise him or her, and at least spot-check the work for accuracy.

Remember that on any closed question, the total of your percentages must add up to 100 percent. For example, if you calculated that 40 percent of your respondents said “yes” to a certain question, 40 percent said “no,” and 40 percent said “uncertain,” that would add up to 120 percent. You obviously made a mistake somewhere. If readers see you have made a careless mistake like that, they will suspect that your whole project was careless and that your conclusions cannot be trusted.

More . . .

[7.2.1.F Exception: When your percentages may total more than 100%](#)

[7.2.1.G Note on cross-tabulation](#)

Do your tallying and checking now. Thank God for every discovery you make.

[Back to Table 7.1 to continue](#)

7.2.2 Appendix B (optional): Questionnaire in local language

Now add Appendix B, your questionnaire in the local language (if you used one). You may include the responses and percentages from Appendix A in Appendix B also, but you are not required to do so. Only add them if you want them yourself or if you plan to show Appendix B to people who would prefer to read it in the local language.

[Back to Table 7.1 to continue](#)

7.2.3 Appendix C: Biographical sketch

Now add Appendix C, Biographical Sketch (or “About the Author”). If you omitted

“Appendix B” above, then this is Appendix B rather than Appendix C. In 100 to 200 words describe yourself, majoring on aspects of your present and/or past ministry and training that relate to the subject of your research. Include your nationality, church, agency or institution, position, and education.

This completes your appendices. The other easy parts to write are at the beginning—the sections on introduction and methodology.

[Back to Table 7.1 to continue](#)

7.2.4 Introduction: your insight question

Questions to cover in the Introduction:

- What is your research topic?
- Why does it matter to you or anyone else?
- What has already been written about it?
- What population are you describing?

Your insight question is the central question of your Breakthrough report. State this clearly in your introduction and make sure everything in your report revolves around answering this one question. You would be amazed by the number of research reports that say a lot of things more or less related to the main question but never actually answer it.

As you explain why this question is important to you, you may re-use some of the material from your case study. It is best to condense it to a paragraph or two if possible.

After your case study, describe the need for research on this topic. Why should anyone else be concerned about it? Who else is already concerned about it? This is the place to mention the books or articles you found that relate to your topic (but remember to [avoid the cut and paste approach](#)). Explain any of these things which are relevant:

- how these books or articles overlap with your research
- how they influenced your research design
- why you believe they do not adequately answer your insight question in your situation

Do not get bogged down in your introduction. Don't use so much time on the easy parts of your report that you have to rush through the hard parts, especially your conclusion.

Researchers often use 50 percent or more of the report on the introduction and methodology sections. Those sections should total only about 20 percent. [See column 1 in Table 7.1](#). If you use 50 percent on introductory matters (including library research), you leave yourself little room to report and emphasize your own insights from your field research, which are the main things that make your report valuable.

[Back to Table 7.1 to continue](#)

7.2.5 Your methods and activities

Questions to cover in your section on methodology:

- In what way and for what aspect of your project did you use the required methods (case study, interviews, survey⁸)?
- Where and when did you use these methods? Any problems?
- How much time and how many people were involved in your interviews and survey?

⁸ You will also use the focus group method during the Breakthrough process, but you do not mention it in your report because you do not use it until the report is completed. Your focus group will help you follow through on the insights your report describes.

- How did you select your sample group?
- How confident are you that the methods produced reliable information? Is there anything you would do differently if you could do the research over?
- What was the role of prayer in your research?

If you want anyone to take your research conclusions seriously, you must describe how you went about gathering your data. You must show that you have done valid research because you followed the guidance of chapters 4-6.

This section is also fairly short. You do not need to go into great detail about your methods, but do say enough that people do not think you gathered your data by simply going to the bus stop one morning and talking to the first five people you met. That kind of "research" is completely unconvincing.

Remember that *it is very common for readers to reject research conclusions because they do not believe that the sample group truly represents the population*. Be sure to defend your research well at this key point. Clearly explain which population you are describing, which kind of sample group you chose, and how you chose the particular individuals you did.

[Back to Table 7.1 to continue](#)

7.2.6 Title page

Questions to be covered by your title page:

- What is this document?
- Is it worth opening?

The last of the easy parts of your writing is the title page. Even if you are not yet sure of a good title for your paper, choose a temporary title. The rest of the layout of the page will

stay the same even if you change the wording of the title later.

Choosing a title is a much-neglected part of writing a research report. A good title and sub-title can attract attention to your insights and even draw people toward the breakthrough you envision. A poor title can prevent them from paying any attention.

There are many ways to create good titles. I will describe only one of these. If you have a better method, use that instead. I propose that you use a title and subtitle in combination. For example,

[title] Preparing for Informal Witness

[subtitle] A Study of the Effectiveness of Mission Training Programs for Filipino Domestic Workers in the Middle East

Note the following features of this title and subtitle, also in the other examples below.

- The title is short and broad; the subtitle is longer and contains more specifics about the research topic.
- The title should be as interesting and fresh as possible. In this case, the term “informal witness” is at least a bit fresh. The idea makes sense but people may not have heard it said exactly that way before.
- Neither the title nor the subtitle contains academic jargon. Imagine how put off you would be if the subtitle was, “A Longitudinal Analysis of the Quantifiable Impact of Pre-field Missional Development Programs for Filipino Domestic Workers in Japan.” That may be a good title for a Ph.D. thesis, which is aimed at the academic community. It is a poor title for a

Breakthrough report since you expect non-academics to be able to read it.

More . . .

[7.2.6.A Sample titles and subtitles](#)

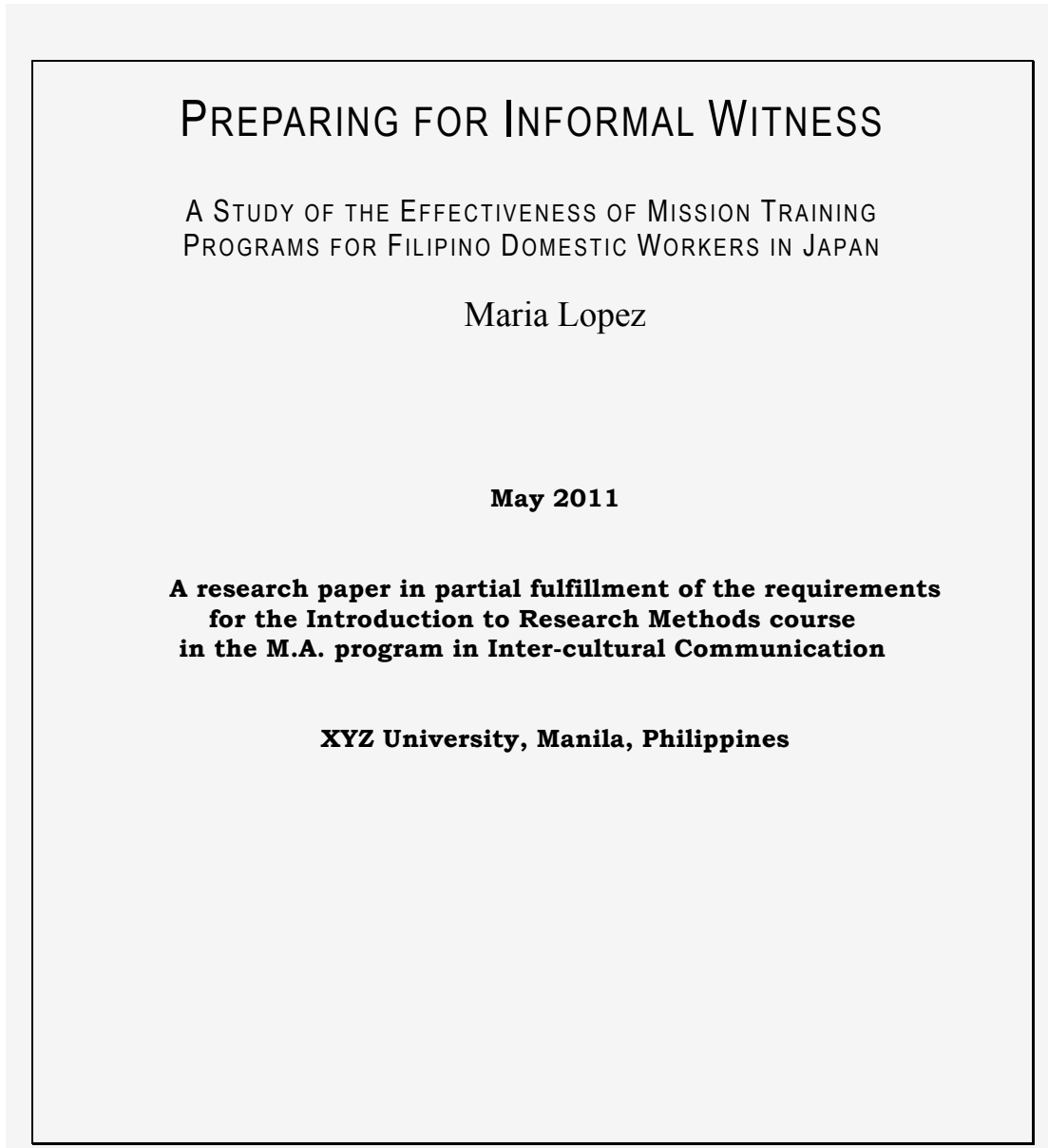
Reconsider the title you put on your Master Worksheet earlier. Update it if you wish.

Prepare your title page as in Diagram 7.2.6 on the next page.

7.3 The hard parts of your report

Naturally, the hard parts of your report are the crucial parts, that is, *the insights, the conclusion and the recommendations* (Parts 3, 4 and 5 in the [Table](#)). Fortunately they are also the most exciting parts. These are the sections where you get to tell people what you see in your data and what should be done about it. What breakthrough insights came to light? What can be done now that may lead to breakthrough impact? In other words, will all your preparation work and data gathering make much difference for Christ and his kingdom in the real world?

Obviously you cannot tell people those things until you have figured them out yourself. That is why the hard parts are hard to write. If they were easy, someone else would have already discovered these insights and you would not need to have done your research. But no one has done the research you did, no one else has the data you have gathered, and no one else has the responsibility or the privilege of figuring out what your data mean. You will do it, and in your research report you will present it as your gift to your community or organization.

Diagram 7.2.6 Sample Title Page

Suggested prayer: God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I love you with all my heart, my soul, and especially today with my mind. I am preparing a research report as a sacrifice to

you, the work of a mind devoted to you. Let it be like "a lamb without spot or blemish." Help me to choose and prepare a sacrifice that will please you and bring you joy.

Worksheet 7.3 Carving out Some Time to Write

1. What normal activities are you planning to set aside so you can concentrate and finish the writing of your research report?
2. Which of the above activities is most likely to creep back into your schedule and eat up some writing time?
3. To prevent those problems from creeping back in, do something about them right now. On which days of the week will you set aside “writing time”? What time(s) on those days will you do your thinking, praying and writing?
4. Where will you go to write, and how will you control the interruptions while you are there?

More . . .

[7.3.A If you will be writing a thesis](#)

7.3.1 From data to insights (from stones to walls)

Questions to cover in your insight section:

- As you did research about the insight question and the hypotheses on your Master Worksheet, what new insights emerged for you?
- What evidence led you to these insights?

[Back to Table 7.1 to review the report outline](#)

Before you move from data to insights, you may want to preview the bigger picture. The rest of this chapter will take you from data to insights. The next chapter will take you from insights to a conclusion and then from a conclusion to recommendations.

More . . .

[7.3.1.A Example of moving from data to insights to conclusion to recommendations](#)

As you begin to draw the insights out of your data, your Master Worksheet and your three “Summary Sheets” will get you started. Then you will add insights from the statistics in Appendix A (quantitative data from your survey) and from the field notes you took during your interviews (qualitative data).

Your guiding question for the whole process is, “*What does my data mean?*” Many researchers gather their data well but do not understand how to discover the meaning in it. Therefore all they do in their research report is list or recite their data, and they are surprised when they get a low mark on the paper. The instructor is expecting them to explain what the data means, and they have not done it. They are like the person described in the Tanzanian proverb, “I pointed out the stars but he only saw my finger.” The data is a pointing finger. Describe what it is pointing to.

The crucial difference between data and insight is shown in the following table. In this example Americans working in Southeast Asia are using the insight question, “Why did we have such a poor response to our last evangelism program?”

Table 7.3.1 The Difference between Data and Insights

Data (what the researchers observed)	Insight (what they think the data may mean)
Over half our workers said they had low or very low expectations that the program would be fruitful.	The workers were probably not enthusiastic when they used the program. That could explain why they got a poor response from the community. (We thought that most of our workers liked the program, but now we realize they did not.)
The average attendance at prayer meetings before the program was only four people.	The lack of serious, united prayer may have weakened the evangelistic program. (We expected 12-15 people would come to pray.)
When we asked a few non-believers in the community for comments on the evangelistic literature that had been used in our program, they all told us that it seemed very American.	The literature seemed foreign, both in the way it looked and the way it was written. That could have been a bigger problem than we thought. (It did not seem foreign to us, of course.)

Note that all the insights in the table above relate to the researchers' insight question. The insights often involve a contrast between what the people assumed before the research and what they realized after they gathered their data. They are drawing meaning from their data, and they are able to see their situation in a fresh, more insightful way.

Note that none of the insights tell them what to do about what they have observed. For example, their data show them that the workers do not believe in the program. Does this mean the leaders should change to a program that the workers believe in or try harder to get the workers to believe in the program they are already using? They cannot tell from the data. That is OK. Right now they are simply trying to use the data to answer their insight question, "Why was there a poor response?" The answer will identify areas that they need to do something about, such as the level of staff enthusiasm. They should wait till later to figure out what to do about them. (See chapter 8.)

More . . .

[7.3.1.B Danger of confusing the insight step with the action step](#)

Think again of your research report as a house you are building. Now you are going to build walls (insights) from your stones (data). Each wall stands for one of your key insights, and each insight will be one of the main sub-sections of the "Insight" section of your report. Together the walls will support the roof (conclusion). You have to decide how many walls to build, that is, how many key insights it will take to support your conclusion about your insight question. Work with your data now and see how many you get.

More . . .

[7.3.1.C Option for using only one or two walls](#)

For this step you will need your Master Worksheet, your Summary Sheets from the three stages of your fieldwork, your complete

set of field notes from your interviews, and your data tally from Appendix A. Get those together.

7.3.2 Master Worksheet—the guide to insight

Re-read items 5 and 6 on your Master Worksheet. The “Insight” section of your research report is the meat of your report. The “Insight” section of your report will explain two things:

- What you believe is the best answer to item 5, your insight question
- How accurate or inaccurate each part of item 6, your hypotheses, turned out to be

Your insight question and your hypotheses guided your work of writing questions and gathering data. Now they will continue to guide you as you turn data into insight.

The problem is that data, like building stones, come in all shapes and sizes. To turn data into insight, you must select the right pieces of the data and fit them together skillfully. Otherwise your supposed insight will be a mistake instead of a revelation and your “wall” may collapse. Another danger is that your insights may go off in the wrong direction, having nothing to do with the rest of the “house” you are trying to build. Your Master Worksheet will prevent those mistakes if you keep it in mind throughout your writing process.

7.3.3 Insights from Summary Sheets

When you prepared the three Fieldwork Summary Sheets after the three stages of your fieldwork, you were noting a few things that seemed most important to you at the time. These may have been raw data, such as a particular quote from a respondent, or you

may have already converted them into “insights” when you wrote them on the sheet. For example, you may have written a reflection or evaluation concerning a particular answer that kept coming up.

With your insight question and hypotheses in mind, re-read your answers to the first three questions on the three Summary Sheets. As you re-read them, you may see that some of your answers are exactly on target and others are a little off target. Choose the ones that are on target and keep them in mind as you do steps 3 and 4 below.

Decision 7.3.3 *Of all the highlights you recorded on your Summary Sheets, which two, three, or four do you think will help you the most as you write about your new insight into your situation?*

7.3.4 Insights from field notes (qualitative data)

Qualitative data is the data you get from open questions, that is, questions that the respondent was free to answer in any way that suited him/her. You used open questions in your interviews and you may have used one or two on your survey. You recorded the responses in the form of field notes.

Re-reading your field notes is a lot harder than re-reading your Summary Sheets. You will find that you wrote incomplete sentences, made comments you now cannot understand, or wrote so quickly that now you cannot read it yourself. In spite of these problems, there are good reasons to read back through every note you wrote and to do it in one sitting if possible. The reasons

will become obvious as you do the re-reading in the following way:

Begin your re-reading session with prayer. You may want to use a longer prayer than the one suggested here because this is such an important point in the Breakthrough process.

Suggested prayer: Lord Jesus, as Messiah you opened the eyes of the blind. Please open my eyes too as I look over my field notes. Let me see the insights not just the pile of data. Wipe away my biases. Give me the correct impressions from my data, and let me see my situation more insightfully than ever before. Yes, Lord, that is what I really want out of this whole project.

Read back through all your field notes, highlighting everything important, especially everything that you may want to quote in your research report. Don't highlight too much or the process will lose its value for you. If you like to color code things, you may use a different colored highlighter for things relating to each hypothesis. This is more complicated to do but it enables you to scan back over your field notes quite easily as you are writing up your insights about each hypothesis.

As you read through your field notes, you may read more perceptively if you try to recall and picture the actual conversations. The way a person said something may give you more insight than your note about what was said.

Get a blank sheet of paper and write "Insights – Long List" at the top. Start your "long list" with the two, three, or four in-

sights from section 7.3.3. Add to the list whenever you realize that one of your field notes is giving you an insight about your insight question and/or one of your hypotheses. Do not worry about the wording or the order of these possible insights as you add them to your list. Just get them all onto your long list. You will reduce it to a short list later.

Getting insight out of data is more an art than a science, and different people reach insights by different routes. For example, some people process data better when they are completely alone and uninterrupted. Others process it better by talking about it. If you are a talker, get a friend and talk through your notes while you are marking them and making your long list of insights. For talkers, this can transform data analysis from a chore to a pleasure. Such interaction is permitted as long you are actually processing the data in your mind, not merely writing down your friend's thoughts.

As you create your long list, keep two basic guidelines in mind: *See everything that is in your data; don't see anything that is not there.*

7.3.4.1 See everything that is in your data.

The first guideline may not seem difficult. You have already seen some things in your data and put them on your Fieldwork Summary Sheets. As you re-read your entire set of field notes now, some further discoveries may jump right out at you, perhaps from one single comment during an interview. Suddenly you realize what the comment means and how it relates to your insight question. The lights come on for you. It is a wonderful feeling. Thank God for it every time it happens, and add each discovery to your "long list."

While you are reading and looking for the notes that give you insight, be aware that *some insights do not jump out at you from just one note by itself*. Some of them can be discovered only by combining data that came at different times or in answer to different questions.

Though you are not doing the “detective” style of research that Boma was doing in that you are not looking for one “criminal” to blame, it may help you to think of yourself as a detective while you are turning your data into insight. A detective must look at everything and remember all the data until somehow two or three clues come together in the right way, giving the insight needed. These clues may not have looked important at all in the beginning, but eventually the detective realizes what the clues mean. You are doing the same thing as you read your field notes, figuring out what your “clues” (data) mean.

More . . .

[7.3.4.1.A Examples of converting qualitative data to quantitative for greater insight](#)

7.3.4.2 *Don't see anything that is not there.*

The second basic guideline, “Don’t see anything that is not there,” is not the danger of blindness but of hallucination. Why do researchers “hallucinate” with their data? Why do they see things in their data that are not really there? Why do they think their data means what it does not mean? Why do they say it proves what it does not prove? Because of their biases and/or their misuse of research methods.

The danger of bias is very high in a Break-through research project because you were required to begin with a concern that you

feel strongly about. You already had given this topic a lot of thought and prayer. You probably had some strong feelings about it and you may have had some strong opinions too. You were an ideal candidate for bias, the sneakiest of all the enemies of research.

How could bias sneak up on you and hurt your research?

- In the way you wrote your insight question and especially in the hypotheses you wrote at the beginning
- In your choice of what questions to ask and how to phrase them
- In the way you listened to your respondents, hearing what you wanted to hear and missing the clues that went against your bias
- In the way you chose the “important” things to mention on your Summary Sheets
- And now in the way you read your field notes and arrive at insights

Hopefully the process of reading through all your field notes at one sitting will help you recognize any biases you had, but it will only do that if you have a genuinely open mind.

Besides bias, the other reason researchers “hallucinate” with their data is poor research methods. For example, they may write a bad question and the answers may not mean what the researcher thinks they mean. Or they may choose a sample group that does not represent the population they are trying to research. The answers from the sample group do not mean that the whole population thinks the same thing, but the researcher claims they do.

Mistakes like these were covered in Chapter 4. In the methodology section of your research

report, you will make it clear that you did not spoil your research by making these mistakes. Thus your readers can trust your findings because they can tell you were not hallucinating with your data.

7.3.5 Insights from Appendix A (quantitative data)

You have probably identified most or all of your most important insights in the previous step when you reviewed your interview data, which was mostly qualitative. Now as you go on to your quantitative data (mostly from your survey), adjust your long list of insights. You may add some new items, add some supporting evidence for items already on the list, or correct some items if you realize you were being too subjective when you interpreted your qualitative data.

More . . .

7.3.5.A What does “too subjective” mean?

7.3.5.B May a research project be done entirely with quantitative methods or entirely with qualitative methods?

There are incredibly sophisticated ways to draw insights out of quantitative data using statistical analysis. There are also quite simple ways, and these will be our focus in the Breakthrough process. As you begin to use them according to the guidelines below, remember what was said earlier in this chapter about the way your hypotheses and your insight question will guide you to your insights.

More . . .

7.3.5.C Do you know or want to know more about the sophisticated ways?

7.3.5.1 Look for variations

This is your basic first step with data from multiple-choice questions. Which answers were given most, which least, and most importantly, *what do the percentages mean?* In other words, what do the percentages indicate about the hypothesis that this question relates to? If all you do in your report is say, “25% said answer A, 42% said answer B,” you are only reporting your data, not saying what it means. If that distinction is not clear to you, look carefully at the examples below.

More . . .

7.3.5.1.A Example of right and wrong ways to comment on a data table

7.3.5.1.B Example of insight from opinions that point strongly in one direction

7.3.5.1.C Example of insight from evenly divided opinions

7.3.5.2 Look for surprises

The greatest insights from research often come as surprises. These show up in various ways. Some are surprises because *the answers do not confirm what you expected*. Pay special attention to these, and do not feel embarrassed at all about them. Your work as a researcher is not to prove your hypotheses but to get insight by investigating your hypotheses. Sometimes you can get more insight by proving one of your hypotheses wrong than by proving it right.

Some surprises are *built into the pattern of the data*. For example, you might see that on an Agree-Disagree question, 60% strongly agreed, 10% disagreed, and 30% strongly disagreed, but no one answered “agree” or “not sure.” This is very surprising. Usually there are several answers in the middle categories. The insight in this case would be

that the group is very polarized. They probably have talked about this issue or even argued about it. People seem to have their minds made up. It may be a dangerous issue for you to discuss in your report.

Some surprises only appear when you *compare the answers to different questions*. These are harder to notice than the other surprises. What you usually notice is a contradiction between the answers to two or more questions. Since people answered question A in one way, you expect that they will answer question B in a similar way, but they do not. Your challenge then is to figure out why they did not. As you try to figure that out, you may come to a new insight about how they interpreted your questions and how they are thinking.

More . . .

[7.3.5.2.A Example of conflicting data from two questions](#)

Some surprises can be *your own mistakes*. If Appendix A says that 80% of your respondents strongly agreed with something but you know that most people actually disagreed with that, look at your data again. You may have counted some answers twice, miscalculated a percentage, or listed responses under a wrong question number.

Some surprises will remain *mysteries*. Sometimes you cannot find a mistake or any other explanation for a surprise in your data. In such cases you may (if you have time) do some follow-up interviews with a few respondents to see if you can clear things up. Otherwise you say in your report that you noticed the surprise but were not sure what it meant. If you try to draw an insight from it, state it tentatively. You might recommend further research on it.

7.3.5.3 Look for a “magic number”

A “magic number” is one kind of surprise, perhaps the best kind. In some Break-through projects, perhaps 20% or 30%, there is a “magic number” somewhere in the quantitative data. It is such a clear and powerful number that by itself it can arrest and focus people’s attention on your research. It is a compelling number. Watch for such a number in your data. If it is there, recognize it and emphasize it in your report. Even if you cannot find a magic number in your data, the process of looking for it may help you recognize a few numbers that are almost magic, and these can be very useful.

More . . .

[7.3.5.3.A Example of a magic number](#)

7.3.5.4 Look for danger signals

We have already described surprises that are actually mistakes. These are danger signals, but there are others to watch out for too.

Sometimes because of your wider knowledge of the situation, you sense that people’s answers to a question cannot be reflecting their true opinions. For example, 70% may have disagreed with a statement that you expected nearly everyone to agree with. This is a danger signal. Check the wording of the question carefully. Look for ways that they might have misinterpreted it. Remember that *people always answer the question they think they hear, not the question you think you are asking*.

More . . .

[7.3.5.4.A Example of a misunderstood question](#)

Sometimes people’s answers to one question point toward one insight but their answers to another question point in the opposite direction. That is another danger signal. Watch out for it, take it seriously if you see

it, and spend some time figuring it out if possible. Never put too much trust in the answers to *one question by itself*.

More . . .
[7.3.5.4.B Examples of self-contradictory data](#)

Also keep an eye out for conflict between the findings from your quantitative data and your qualitative data (assuming the data is supposed to represent different individuals in the same sample group). Check whether you got the wrong impression from the qualitative data, perhaps because of your own assumptions or wishes. On the other hand, the quantitative data may be the data that is wrong. Perhaps the calculations are off or the question was misleading.

More . . .
[7.3.5.4.C Example of conflict between quantitative and qualitative data](#)

If *100% of your respondents* answer a question in the same way, that may be a danger signal. Do not assume it proves the answer beyond all doubt. It may have been a poor or obvious question. Perhaps they could tell how you wanted them to answer it and they all cooperated.

More . . .
[7.3.5.4.D Should an insight go onto the long list if it is suggested by the quantitative or qualitative data but not really proven?](#)

Articles in Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org)

- “Statistics”
- “Social statistics”

Readings in Robson, *Real World Research*, 2nd ed.

Pages	Starting point (section or chapter title)	Notes and instructions
100-109	“Establishing Trustworthiness in Fixed Design Research”	Review these pages that you first read during Chapter 4.
168-177	“Establishing Trustworthiness in Flexible Design Research”	Review these pages that you first read during Chapter 4.
Ch. 13, 391-454	“Analysis of Quantitative Data”	An introduction to statistics and the methods of handling them on computer. Relevant if you have a good background in mathematics and plan to survey a very large sample group for your thesis.
Ch. 14, 455-499	“Analysis of Qualitative Data”	An overview of the vast range of approaches, including the use of computer software.
460	“Deficiencies of the Human as Analyst”	A very helpful list of common pitfalls.
475-485	“Components of Data Analysis”	Extremely useful outline of the “Miles and Huberman” approach.

A Blessing

May the Holy Spirit, who brooded over the primeval waters and turned chaos into creation, help you brood creatively over the chaos of your data. May he create now through you. May the Lord, the source of all wisdom, keep you from missing or mistaking the meaning of your data. He knows what your data means. May his thoughts be your thoughts.

8. CONVERTING INSIGHTS TO A CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*Asking the right questions
to the right people in the right way
in order to gather information that provides fresh insight
leading toward creative recommendations and actions
according to God's will and for his glory. (cf. Phil. 1:9-11)*

Chapter contents:

8.0 Introduction

8.1 From a long list of insights to a short list of insights (from stones to walls)

8.2 From a short list of insights to a conclusion (from walls to roof)

8.3 From conclusion to recommendations (from roof to keys)

8.4 Checklist for research report

8.0 Introduction

The Diviner Gives Boma His Conclusion and Recommendation

The diviner explained, "When we see that unusual kind of thing on the left side of a lung, it means the problem is coming from the west." Boma's mind started racing as he imagined which of his possible enemies lived west of him but his thoughts were interrupted by the diviner announcing his conclusion, "We have to protect the west wall of your house. Wait here while I go back into the medicine room and prepare something for you."

Soon he returned with a medicine pouch. "Take this cooling ash home. Tonight when the moon is directly overhead, mix it with some fresh spring water, and smear it all over the west wall of your house. Then your troubles will cool down."

Notice the sequence—*data, insight, conclusion, recommendation*. The diviner's *data* are the abnormal lung of the chicken and Boma's earlier comments. He claims that both pieces of data give him the same *insight*, which is that the trouble is coming from the west. Since the insight is confirmed in two ways (or so he thinks), he draws the *conclusion* that the trouble is indeed coming from the west. His *recommendation* is that Boma should protect the west wall of his house by smearing some medicinal ash on it.

The diviner's recommendation depends on his conclusion and his conclusion depends on his insight. If the conclusion or the insights are wrong, the recommendation will be worthless. Boma knows this, and he does not like it. He is not sure how far he can trust the diviner.

He does not know how the diviner got the insights by looking at the chicken's lung or

listening to his comments about his neighbors. He does not have a clear answer to his own insight question, “Who or what is causing all his troubles?” He does not know if the diviner’s conclusion is accurate (Is it really the west wall that needs to be protected? Why not some other wall? Or why not wear the medicine or drink it instead of smear it on the house?) He does not know why the recommendation may work (he does not know what secret ingredients are in the pouch of ash). However, he is desperate and he knows that he has no way to test the diviner’s recommendation except to try it.

Do not leave your readers guessing the way the diviner left Boma guessing. You are a researcher not a diviner! As mentioned previously, a diviner is secretive and ambiguous about everything. You should be just the opposite. Clearly explain how you arrived at your insights and how you moved from insights to conclusion to recommendations. Then others will be able to see how you did it, and your work will be more convincing to them.

Before you try to convince others about your conclusion, be convinced yourself, and make sure you are convinced by the data itself, not by your assumptions and biases. This is the point where *research gets extremely dangerous to the researcher* and everyone around him or her. You are going to move from insights to a conclusion to recommendations.

If you make a mistake in the process, you can get yourself into a lot of trouble. You can say the Lord led you to a conclusion he did not lead you to, and you can recommend changes that are the opposite of what he wants. You can disgrace yourself. You can disrupt the work of your organization

and others. You can damage your reputation as a leader, a team player, and a person who thinks clearly. You can hurt or embarrass people. You can make enemies. You can lose your job. Your research can result in a breakdown instead of a breakthrough.

More . . .

[8.0.A Mr. Makala – Fictional example of the damage that research can do](#)

You probably did not anticipate that research could be so dangerous personally, spiritually and relationally, but wake up to that fact. It is better to hang a millstone around the neck of your project and throw it into the sea than to let it make things worse for you and other people. Or as one American writer has put it,

“Tiz better tew know nuthin’ than tew know what ain’t so.”⁹

Bad research makes researchers think they know things that “ain’t so.” It is better not to do research than to draw the wrong conclusion from it. Trusting a wrong conclusion is like trusting a cracked rung on a ladder. It may look strong enough to support you but when you step on it, you get a nasty surprise and go crashing down. Use utmost care as you convert your insights into a conclusion. If you follow the process outlined in the rest of this chapter, you will avoid jumping to any conclusion too quickly.

⁹ “It is better to know nothing than to know what is not so.” (Kin Hubbard wrote in the dialect of rural Indiana, a state in the Midwest region of the United States.)

8.1 From a long list of insights to a short list of insights (from stones to walls)

Now that you have made your long list of insights from your data, you are almost ready to begin writing the “hard parts” of your research report, starting with the “Insights” section. This section is the largest section of your report, about 40% of the total. This is the section where you report what data you gathered and what you think it means.

[Back to Table 7.1 to review the report outline](#)

Your data and insights will not arrange themselves to become your research report any more than stones will arrange themselves to become the walls of a house. A builder has to do it, and the builder has to have a plan in mind. What is your plan for organizing your data and insights to create the “Insight” section of your research report?

It is tempting to use a simple plan, going straight through the lists of questions you used in your interviews and surveys, reporting the answers to each question and commenting on any insight you got from each one. Usually this is a bad idea and the presentation is boring and ineffective because the really important insights do not stand out adequately from the mass of information in your list.

The aim of your “Insights” section should be to cover your key insights, not necessarily to cover all the questions you asked. Spend the most time discussing the questions that produced the most insight. If a particular question produced no insight, you do not need to say anything about it in your “Insights” section. (You should still list it in Appendix A.)

Another simple plan for organizing your “Insight” section is to go down your long list of insights, commenting on each one as you go. This is a bad idea for the same reason—your key insights will not stand out well in that kind of list.

Instead of thinking of your questionnaires or your long list of insights as a checklist of 10, 15, or 20 items you will comment on in your “Insights” section, *reduce the long list to a short list of three, four, or five key insights*, using the guidelines below. These key insights may be individual insights, such as a specific quotation from one interview, or clusters of similar insights, such as information from several interviews or from some interviews and some survey questions.

Your short list will give you your plan or outline for the “Insights” section. You will develop each main insight in the list as a sub-section. Together your three, four, or five sub-sections will make up the whole “Insights” section of your report. The conclusion of your report will rest on these sub-sections of your “Insights” section as the roof of a house rests on its walls.

8.1.1 Working with your hypotheses

To identify your key insights, the first step is to check your hypotheses. You probably had three or four hypotheses on your Master Worksheet. Your insights will often be statements about how true or untrue they turned out to be.

More . . .

[8.1.1.A Are researchers always biased in favor of their own hypotheses?](#)

Sometimes it happens that each hypothesis produces one main insight. More often it happens that the key insights emerge in an irregular way as shown in the table below:

Table 8.1.1 How Hypotheses Relate to Insights

Focus of research	Result of research
Hypothesis 1	Key insight 1 Key insight 2
Hypothesis 2	No insight
Hypothesis 3	Key insight 3
(No hypothesis. Unexpected discovery)	Key insight 4

More . . .

[8.1.1.B Example: how could a hypothesis produce no insight at all?](#)

[8.1.1.C Example: how could anyone discover an insight that did not relate to any hypothesis they were researching?](#)

While you are looking at your hypotheses, you will probably notice that your data definitely proved some of them correct or incorrect but others may still be uncertain. Your key insights may or may not be the ones you are most certain of.

For example, your data may seem to be saying that people are looking at your issue in a particular way that you had not thought of. This new idea may be a deep insight into their thinking, but what do you do if your data are not strong enough for you to be sure your interpretation is right? Can this new idea be listed as one of your key insights or not?

Yes it can because it is one of the most useful things to come out of your research. However, do not imply that you are sure about it. Explain why you think the evidence points in this direction but explain your doubts or limitations too. When you get to the “Recommendations” section of your report, suggest further research on it.

8.1.2 Choosing your approach

Now that you know your key insights will probably correspond only partly with your hypotheses, look at your long list of insights. Be careful. Pray intensely. Everything from this point on in your Breakthrough process depends on how well you identify the key insights in your data.

Suggested prayer: Dear Lord, help me! Thank you for my respondents and their willingness to talk to me. Thank you for the insights you have given me from their answers and stories. Now please show me which insights are the main ones that will lead me toward a breakthrough as I serve you.

Choose one of the following approaches depending on how your list looks to you:

More . . .

8.1.2.A Your approach if you already see which insights are the key insights

8.1.2.B Your approach if you can intuitively arrange your long list into three or four clusters of insights, leaving only a few items that do not fit

8.1.2.C Your approach if you are not seeing the key insights yet and you want a specific technique to help you dig for them

8.1.2.D Your approach if you really have only one or two key insights instead of three or four

8.1.2.E If you got only one main insight from your data

8.1.2.F If you got two key insights from your data

8.1.3 Write your “Insights” section now or later?

Now that you have identified the key insights that will be the sub-sections of the “Insights” section of your report, you may write that section if you wish. However, some writers prefer to write the “Conclusion” section first. Either way is OK because the “Conclusion” section is mostly a summary of the ideas in the “Insights” section. Some people find it easier to write the summary first so they can expand it into the “Insights” section. Others prefer to write the full “Insights” section first so they can condense it into the summary.

8.2 From a short list of insights to a conclusion (from walls to roof)

Questions to cover in your conclusion:

- What is the answer to your insight question?

- What do you think your insights mean when you put them all together?

[Back to Table 7.1 to review the report outline](#)

As you begin to move toward your conclusion, be aware that in this guide, “*conclusion*” means only your answer to your insight question, not your action question. Do not say, “My conclusion is that our organization should do such and such.” That is not your conclusion. It is your recommendation. You will get to that in section 8.3. For now, think only of your insight question. (If this is not absolutely clear, see [Aren’t my conclusion and my recommendation the same thing?](#))

As mentioned above, the conclusion is a summary of the three or four sub-sections of your “Insights” section. These were built around the three or four key insights on your short list (unless you used the [option for only one or two insights](#)). Now build your conclusion on top of these insights like a roof on the walls of a house, using the guidelines below.

The conclusion is the first of the two most important sections of the report, the sections that many readers will look at first. The other one is “Recommendations.” In these two sections you do the exact opposite of what the diviner did with Boma. You explain exactly how you moved from data to insights to conclusion to recommendations. You want to put your line of thinking into plain sight so your organization or community will believe that your recommendation is a good idea.

As you reach your conclusion, remember four things about a roof (a conclusion) and walls (insights):

8.2.1 A roof must be tied to the walls or it will blow off

Your “Insights” section described your key insights, one in each sub-section. Now look at them all together and explain how they answer your insight question. As you do so, your summary will naturally tie in to your “Insights” section and sub-sections. Remember that your conclusion is a summary. You should not mention any data or insights in your conclusion that were not mentioned already in the “Insights” section. The only new thing in the conclusion should be your explanation of the way your insights all fit together.

8.2.2 A roof cannot be put up in thin air or resting on just one wall

Your conclusion must be properly supported by your insights. When researchers are biased, they write whatever conclusion they want even if their insights do not support it. They think the insights prove it, and that is what they claim, but when other people look at the conclusion, they see a roof lying on the ground. It may be near the walls of the house or perhaps leaning against one of them, but it is not resting on them. People will not buy that house. If you build a conclusion like that, unsupported by your insights, they will not buy your conclusion either. (*The danger of bias* is so serious that it will be discussed again in more detail in the next chapter when you consider your recommendations.)

8.2.3 A roof cannot be too heavy for the walls or they will collapse

Your conclusion cannot be larger than your sample group and your methods can bear. Do not survey one congregation and draw a conclusion about a whole denomination. Do not ask only three questions about a complex topic in your interviews and then draw a conclusion about how your respondents see that whole topic. Your conclusion will collapse.

The same thing will happen if you try to pretend you have a definite conclusion when your data only show it is a possible or probable conclusion. You are bluffing, pretending your data support a bigger “roof” than they actually do. If your data are tentative, let your conclusion be tentative. A small and tentative conclusion that stays in place is far more useful than a big, overconfident one that collapses.

8.2.4 A roof should cover all the walls or it will not protect the house

The previous point talked about conclusions that are too large. Sometimes conclusions can also be too small. When reading students’ research reports, I am often surprised that *their conclusion may say little or nothing about some wonderful discovery they described in their “Insights” section*. They somehow fail to recognize how valuable that particular insight is, and they do not emphasize it in the conclusion as they should. Be sure you have made the most use of all of your insights.

Decision 8.2.4 What conclusion do your key insights point you toward? What is the answer to your insight question?

Suggested prayer: Jesus, Messiah, healer of the blind, what do you want me to see as I look back over my insights? What do you see? Where is all this information pointing? Please teach me. Help me draw the right conclusion from my data and explain it in a spirit of humility and with a desire to serve. Steer me away from any wrong conclusion that would cause pain to people who are doing what you want them to do. Make me and my conclusion a blessing to the Body of Christ, not a liability.

Now choose one of the following approaches as you make the decisions above.

More . . .

8.2.4.A Your approach if your conclusion is already obvious to you

8.2.4.B Your approach if you feel you are only part way to a conclusion

8.2.4.C Your approach if the whole thing looks confusing to you and you cannot conclude anything yet

8.2.4.D Your approach if you do not like the conclusion you are coming to or if you realize some other people are not going to like it

8.2.4.E Your approach if you have several conclusions instead of one

8.3 From conclusion to recommendations (from roof to keys)

Questions to be covered in your Recommendations:

- If your conclusion is correct, what should be done about it? What adjustments do you recommend?
- Who should make these adjustments and how could they realistically make them?
- What else needs to be researched before or while these adjustments are made?

Your conclusion should help people understand your situation or issue better. Your recommendations should help them do something about it.

[Back to Table 7.1 to review the report outline](#)

Think of your recommendations as keys to the house that you have built from your insights and conclusion. Recommendations allow people to “move in” to your work and

benefit from it. Without recommendations, people may not know how to do anything with the insights in your report.

More . . .

8.3.A Aren't my conclusion and my recommendation the same thing?

8.3.B Example from Uganda

There are two kinds of things you can recommend: *action* and *further research*. (Researchers often recommend both.) For example, if your conclusion in the above example (7.3.1) was that inappropriate and offensive methods were a large part of the reason for the poor evangelistic response, you could recommend *action*, such as adopting some new, less offensive method that you propose.

On the other hand, if you are not sure whether the inappropriate methods were a small part of the cause or a large part, you might recommend some *further research* on that point. It is not wise to recommend fixing something that is really only a minor part of the problem. First make sure you know what the main parts of the problem are. Then concentrate your recommendations on those items.

8.3.1 Recommendations for action

Once you have reached a conclusion about your problem with God's help, you can take action to solve it; however, your action will not be diviner's magic, like ash to smear on your house. Instead, you are taking responsibility before God to make some adjustments in your ministry because of the conclusion you reached from your insights. You will recommend some changes in your ministry approach or activity in order to change the way people are responding to it.

How will you decide what to recommend? Recommendations depend partly on your conclusion and partly on several other things such as your general knowledge of the situation and the people involved, your ability to imagine realistic alternatives, and your awareness of other recommendations that have already failed. The Spirit leads you through all these.

Unlike your conclusion, your recommendations do not come directly from your research. Good researchers should all draw the same conclusion from the same data but they may recommend different plans of action because they have different gifts, perspectives, and life experiences. All these will affect the creative process of coming up with recommendations.

Recommendations for action require creativity (though not too much creativity) and courage (though not arrogance or recklessness). This is the prophetic part of your research. With God's help you get others to see what they cannot yet see or do not yet realize. Perhaps you have a prophet's passion about something because through your research the Lord has shown it to you more clearly than ever before. So go ahead, issue some challenges to your circle of influence in light of your insights and conclusions. Be creative as God is creative. Let him guide you so you can guide others into ministry adjustments that will bring more glory to God than what they are doing now.

More . . .

8.3.1.A If you are already fairly sure what to recommend

8.3.1.B If you think you may know what to recommend

8.3.1.C If you are confused or uncertain about what to recommend (cont.)

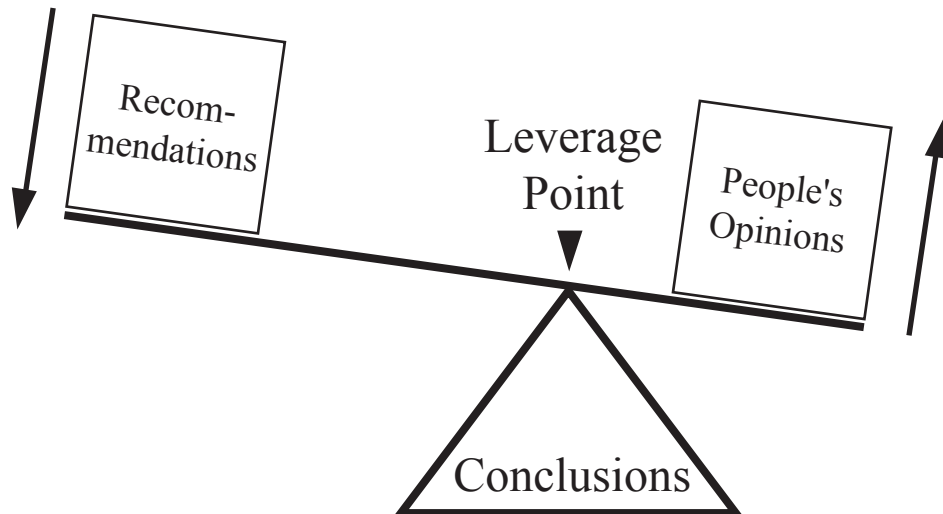
8.3.1.D If you are having a hard time believing that you are supposed to be recommending a change

8.3.1.E If you doubt that anyone will listen to your recommendation

Suggested prayer: Lord Jesus, could you please share with me today a little bit of the creativity and wisdom you showed that day when they asked you about paying taxes to Caesar? That was such a brilliant answer! I want to think like that. I want to be able to recommend God-pleasing solutions where human logic only sees problems. Live in me, Lord, and let me live in you. Make your thoughts my thoughts. Let me not recommend anything except what you put into my mind, and let me not recommend it in a haughty or pushy way.

Decision 8.3.1 What are the main actions or adjustments you recommend on the basis of your conclusion?

DANGER: As you make your recommendations, keep your insights and your conclusion in view. If you sound off about your recommendations without reference to your insights, you are merely stating your opinion. You could have done that before you started your research. As shown in the illustration, the only reason a recommendation gives you leverage to change people's opinions is that it rests firmly on your conclusion, represented by the top point of the triangle.

Diagram 8.3.1 Leverage for Your Recommendations

8.3.2 Recommendations for further research

In addition to or instead of recommending action, you could recommend *further research*. In [the example about the difference between data and insight](#) this could be research about what offends the people being evangelized. That research could lead to more proposals for action. Wherever your conclusion is uncertain or your data has raised new questions, there are ideas for new research. Choose the most significant ones and call attention to them in this section of your report. You may wish to develop one or more of them later as you do your thesis.

Earlier I advised you to start a file of "[Research Ideas for Prayer](#)." If you did so, check the file now for any additional ideas to suggest. Be sure they relate to your topic.

By now you may have put some ideas in the file that came to you in other ways.

As you recommend ideas for further research, some may be entirely new aspects of your topic and others may be things that would make your conclusion about your topic firmer and/or broader. Here are three common kinds of recommendations for further research:

1. *Recommending a somewhat different insight question.* It is not unusual for a researcher to get near the end of the research project and say, "Oh, now I see that I did not ask the right insight question at the beginning. The way I should have worded it is . . ." While working on the "wrong" insight question, you may realize what the right question would be, but you are able to discover the right question only because you had worked

on the wrong one. Therefore your research is a “success” as a step of progress toward a conclusion even though it may be a “failure” to reach a conclusion right now.

2. *Recommending some additional or refined field questions.* As you are trying to draw your conclusion, you may realize where there are holes in your data. You need to know some things that you did not find out yet because you did not ask about them deeply enough or specifically enough. Get specific. Use the benefit of hindsight to say what other questions you wish you had asked.
3. *Recommending some different research methods.* As you near your conclusion, you may realize that you should have surveyed a larger group or a different group than you did. You may have needed to do follow-up interviews. You may have needed to add a different method, such as a focus group.

Decision 8.3.2 What further research do you recommend that would strengthen your conclusion and/or go beyond it?

8.4 Checklist for research report

For your final check before you submit your research report, look back over it with the following questions in mind:

- Have you shown the report to at least one of your study partners before you submit it to your instructor? Have you offered to look over your partner’s report before he/she submits it?

More . . .

8.4.A Am I really allowed to get help from a study partner? Isn’t that cheating?

8.4.B Is it too late to check with a study partner?

- Have you completed all sections of the report and appendices, using approximately the recommended length for each section? See table 7.1, column 1 and the note on page length below the table. Have you cited your sources correctly?

More . . .

8.4.C How should sources be cited?

- Have you focused on your insight question throughout the report and summed up your answer to it in the conclusion?
- Have you clearly shown your flow of thought from your insights to your conclusion to your recommendations?
- Have you made creative but realistic recommendations for prayerful action and/or further research?

More . . .

8.4.D Write to make a difference

- Have you clearly and humbly admitted the limits of your project and the uncertainties you still have about your insights, conclusion and recommendations?

More . . .

8.4.E Know yourself

- In sum, have you produced an interesting and persuasive report?

More . . .

8.4.F Grab people’s attention

Decision 8.4 Have you met the above list of criteria well enough that this report is ready to show to your in-

house supervisor and your coach or instructor? When you have, proceed.

Readings in Robson, *Real World Research*, 2nd ed.

Pages	Starting point (section or chapter title)	Notes and instructions
Note: Many of the readings for chapter 7 are also relevant to this chapter.		
501-511	"Introduction"	Note especially 509-510, "Checklist of Sections in a Report of a Qualitative Study." Similar to Table 7.1 in this guide but with more detail on some points.
519-522	"Writing Skills"	

A Blessing

May the Lord accept your report as a pleasing sacrifice, the fruit of hard work by a mind and heart fully committed to him.

9. TAKING INSPIRED ACTION

*Asking the right questions
to the right people in the right way
in order to gather information that provides fresh insight
leading toward creative recommendations **and actions**
according to God's will and for his glory. (cf. Phil. 1:9-11)*

Chapter contents:

- 9.0 Introduction
 - 9.1 Why research reports do not bring breakthroughs in ministry
 - 9.2 What is a So-What Document?
 - 9.3 Choosing between two types of focus groups
 - 9.4 Developing your So-What Document
 - 9.5 Worksheet on planning your focus group
 - 9.6 Conducting the focus group
 - 9.7 Following through on your So-What Document
 - 9.8 Progress check with in-house supervisor
-

9.0 Introduction

Hopefully by this time you have some new insights into the concern you have been investigating. You have written them up clearly in your research report, answering the insight question on your Master Worksheet. Now it is time to return to the action question on that sheet. Basically this question is, "What does God want us to do now that he has given us some new insights into our situation?" In other words, "*So what?*"

So you made your research plan carefully. So you prepared your questions meticulously. So you kept all the rules when you did your interviews. So you got some new insights. So you drew a solid conclusion and made some good recommendations. So you got a good grade on your report. So what?

Will your new insights lead anywhere? Will anything change? *Will anybody ever do anything with the recommendations that came out of your research?*

Suggested prayer: Lord and Master, ever since I started this Breakthrough process, my desire has been that my project would serve you. The best result would be if you looked at my work and said, "Well done, good and faithful servant." The worst thing would be if you looked at it and said, "So what?" Please don't let that happen. Please make my project a fruitful one, not a fig tree with nothing but leaves.

9.1 Why research reports do not bring breakthroughs in ministry

Do not expect change to happen on its own, no matter how good your recommendations are. Inexperienced researchers often suppose that research naturally has impact if it is done carefully and presented well in a research report.

Therefore, once their report is done, many researchers are satisfied. They have passed the course. They have made their findings available for anyone to read. But they are operating with the naïve view shown in the diagram below.

What they do not realize is that research reports, theses and dissertations are usually low-impact documents even though they

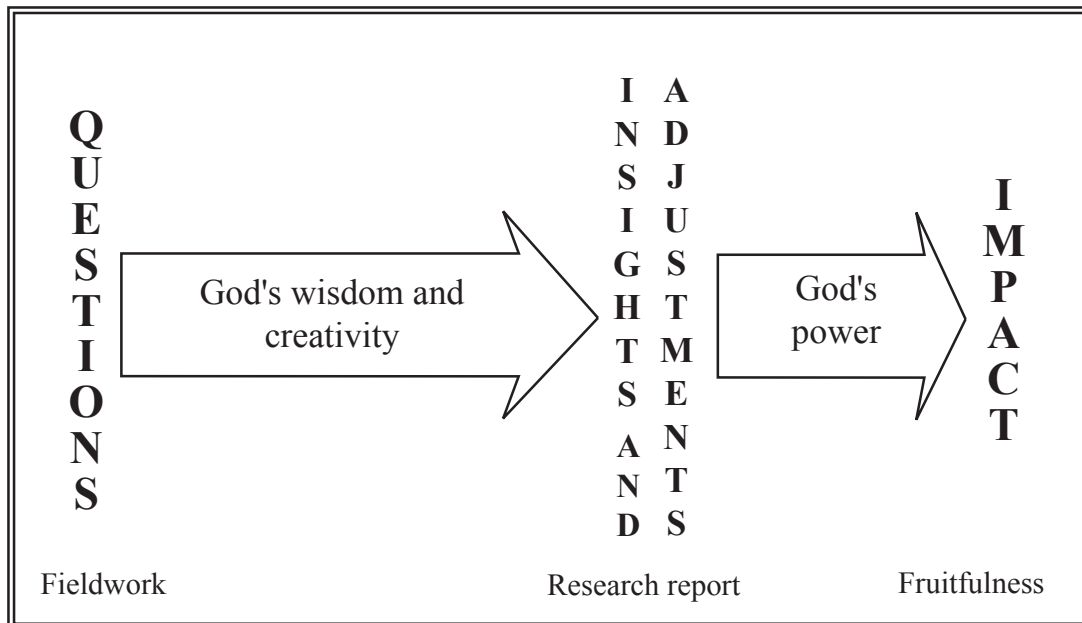
may contain very good insights, thorough analysis, and clear, valuable recommendations. Because of the thorough way that information is presented in research reports, few people ever read them and fewer do anything about them.

If your report has enough detail to satisfy academic requirements, it has way too much detail for most other people. They are too busy. They will never open your carefully written report that your instructor liked so much.

More . . .

9.1.A Example: Research findings that took 264 years to bring life-saving change

Diagram 9.1A The Naïve View of Breakthroughs



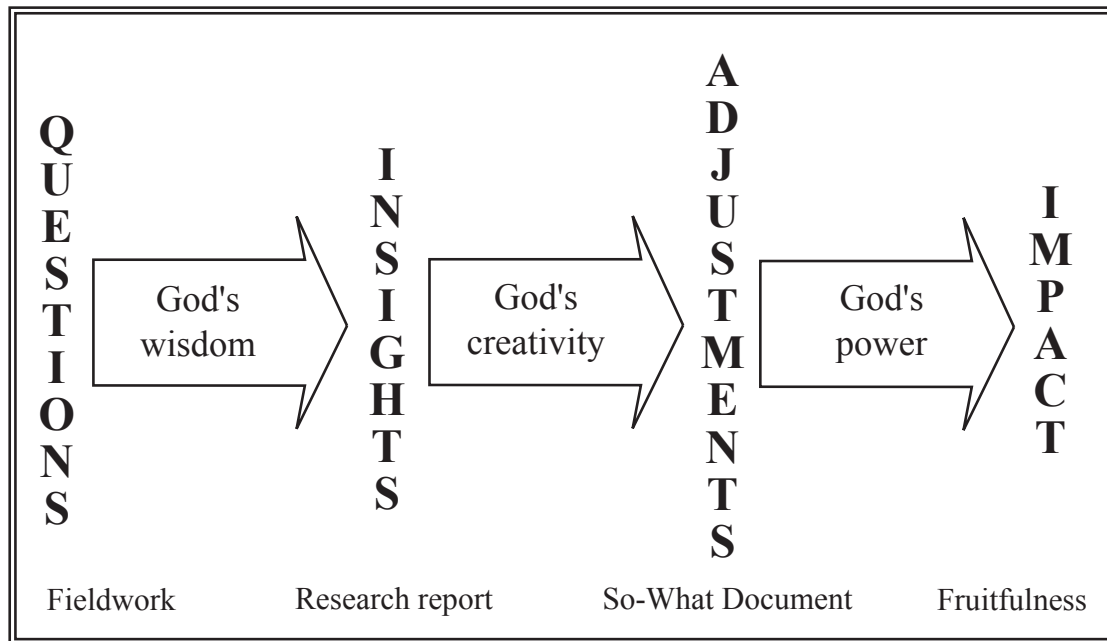
Don't blame the people who will not even pick up your report, and above all, do not despise them. Consider this analogy. When people go to the market for oranges, they do not want a research report about how oranges are grown and harvested. They just want good oranges. They will buy and eat good oranges without knowing much about orange trees.

If you want anybody to adopt the recommendations from your research ("buy your oranges"), if you want your research to contribute anything to Jesus' movement to

transform his followers and his world, *get your key information and recommendation out of your low-impact document (your research report) and convert it into a high-impact form (your So-What Document)*. The So-What Document is the essential bridge between your research report and your breakthrough, as was shown in Diagram 1 at the very beginning of the guide.

Now that you are well into the Breakthrough process, look at the diagram again. Note the new words added at the bottom.

Diagram 9.1B The Breakthrough Process



Suggested prayer: Jesus, lover and transformer of this world, as you look down from your throne onto my situation, what changes should result from the insights you gave during my research? Where will your grace flow more freely because of what we know now? Where and for whom will

your life and peace arrive more fully? Where and how will your kingdom come and your will be done? Please help me find your answers. When you look at my Breakthrough process, I want to hear you say, "Well done," not "So what?"

With the “So what” question ringing in our ears, let’s return to the Boma story.

Boma Takes Experimental Action

As Boma returned home with the pouch of ash, he was still thinking about the enemies he suspected. The diviner had said his troubles were coming from the west. His cousin lived northwest of his house. The widow lived to the south or perhaps slightly southwest. But there was another neighbor he had not thought of who lived directly west, though a little farther away. And a kilometer beyond the neighbor’s house was Serpenter’s Hole, the deep pool in the river where a powerful spirit lived. He hoped that no matter which person or spirit was attacking him, the ash on the west wall would prevent the enemy from doing any further damage.

As we saw in Chapter 8, the diviner gave only a vague answer to the insight question (who or what does Boma need protection from?) but he gave a much more specific answer to the action question, “What should Boma do to protect himself?” He provided a pouch of ash plus instructions on how to apply it. In other words, he gave Boma something he could use.

Imagine that the diviner had given Boma a research report instead of a pouch of ash. The report might have said, “My research shows that there is a 40% chance that your trouble is coming from the widow next door, a 25% chance that it is coming from your cousin, a 25% chance that it is coming from an evil spirit, and a 10% chance that it is coming from somewhere else. Be careful.” How much would Boma have paid the diviner for a report like that? It really tells him no more than he knew by himself in the beginning. He would have wanted his chicken back!

Perhaps the diviner could have given him a more specific recommendation, “My research shows that there is an 85% chance that your trouble is coming from your cousin. Protect yourself from him.” Even if Boma believed this, he still would not know what to do about it. The researcher (diviner) did not put any handles on the recommendation. What Boma really wanted was the pouch of ash and the instructions, and what your community wants from you is the same thing.

Research has a bad name with many people because so much of it does not give people anything they can use. It only reports a few interesting things. People may read your research report and say, “That’s interesting,” but they will not do anything about it. They do not see how they could. They are not looking for your research report but your “pouch of ash,” that is, your So-What Document. This is a document that *presents your recommendations in a way people can use*. The document should provide both motivation and instruction as it applies your insights to your situation.

9.2 What is a So-What Document?

You are ready to write your So-What Document now because you have new insights from your research. Earlier you may have been wondering why people were not responding to your ministry very enthusiastically or why one of your programs was not working very well. Now you are thinking, “Oh, I never realized they felt that way or they thought such and such. Now that I see it, I can approach them differently. I know what I’ll do. I will . . .” The So-What Document is the tool you use to start doing whatever you realize you should do.

A So-What Document is a short, easy to read document that has most or all of these characteristics:

- You cannot write it until you can answer the action question on your Master Worksheet. It is motivated by your answer to that question.
- It is designed for use in the community or organization not the classroom.
- It does something about the concern you wrote on line 1 of your Master Worksheet and/or encourages other people to do something about it.
- It arises naturally from your research data, whether or not it explicitly mentions them.
- It promotes and/or implements one of the main recommendations in your research report.
- It has enough potential impact to justify the amount of work you put into the research.
- It is NOT a summary of your research report. (That would overwhelm and confuse ordinary people rather than convince and motivate them.)

The So-What Document explains and promotes an adjustment you and/or others make in light of the insights from your research. *Because the adjusted method will be better connected with the thoughts and feelings of the people around you than your previous method was, it can have more impact than the previous one was having.* This is how research contributes to ministry breakthroughs.

In case you are finding the whole idea of a “So-What Document” a little vague or confusing so far, do not be surprised. You may never have had this kind of an assignment before. Your confusion should lift as you start developing your document using the following steps. For many people it is much

easier to produce a So-What Document than to try to study it in theory.

9.2.1 The backswing and the swing

Part of your confusion may also be that you expected your research report to be the final assignment for the course, like a final exam. It may not seem necessary or fair for anyone to require you to do an additional document after all the work you already did on your research report. But if the truth be told, a research report is like a backswing, only taken so the athlete is poised for the swing forward that hits the ball.

No athlete takes a backswing and then walks away without swinging forward. Why do so many researchers do that, and why do their academic institutions give them degrees on the basis of their backswing? They graduate but they cannot hit anything in the real world when they swing at it! Yet they brag about the degrees they have earned. They sound like athletes saying, “Did you see the quality of my backswing? It was almost perfect.” So what?

Do better than they do. You have carefully taken your backswing; now swing! Don’t walk away. In the power of the Holy Spirit, create a So-What Document and use it to make a difference in your world.

Here is an example of the backswing and the swing, continued from the previous chapter.

9.2.2 Backswing

- Suppose that the *action question* on your Master Worksheet was, “How can we evangelize more effectively?”
- The *insight question* was, “Why didn’t our last evangelism program work very well?”
- Your *conclusion* based on your field research was, “We used inappropriate

methods that confused people and made the gospel look foreign.”

- Your *recommendation* is, “We should evangelize in a way that clearly makes people feel like the gospel belongs here.”

All of these parts of the Breakthrough process were included in your research report, your “backswing.”

9.2.3 Swing

Your backswing has put you into position to swing forward at your target. Your swing (your So-What Document⁷) will now involve one of two things:

1. *Doing the recommendation yourself.* For example (continued from above), you could write an evangelism presentation that clearly makes the gospel look like God meant it for this particular place, time and situation; or
2. *Urging others to do it.* Write a document that urges other people to write such an evangelism presentation and suggests what kind of a presentation it should be in light of your research.

The second type of swing would make much more explicit reference to your research report than the first, but either type will be based solidly on the insights that came during your backswing.

Of course, it is really embarrassing for an athlete to swing at a ball and miss it. To help you make sure the “swing” you take with your So-What Document hits the ball, you will get some preparatory help from a few friends by using a common research method known as the *focus group*. Two heads are better than one, and a focus group is better than two heads because you will have three to eight “heads” involved.

The next four sections contain the guidelines for choosing between two types of focus groups (9.3), developing your So-What Document (9.4), planning your focus group (9.5), and conducting your focus group (9.6).

9.3 Choosing between two types of focus groups

Your focus group may be either a *test focus group* or an *advisory focus group*. Neither type is much harder or easier than the other. Use the table below to decide which will help you more. In the table, “target group” means the whole group you want the So-What Document to influence when it is finished, not the small group you select for your focus group.

Suggested prayer: Lord, maker of all life’s destinations and maps, I am at another fork in the road. Thank you that I can come to you at times like this. Guide me now to choose the type of focus group that will give me the help you know I need. Let me not mistake my direction for your direction.

Decision 9.3. Using the table below, decide which type of focus group is most appropriate for your situation—a test group or an advisory group. (If you are unsure of what to do, you may want to do your progress check with your in-house supervisor now instead of at the end of this chapter. His/her input may help you decide about a focus group.)

Table 9.3 Two Types of Focus Groups

	Option 1 – Test focus group	Option 2 – Advisory focus group
What the group does	Gives you their opinion of your So-What Document	Helps you plan your So-What Document
When you use it	After you have written a So-What Document When your target group is large	Before you write your So-What Document When your target group is very small, such as a committee
What kind of researcher should use it	Confident about the assignment Better at creativity than analysis; have lots of ideas about how to do a So-What Document	Nervous about the assignment Better at analysis than creativity; not sure how to communicate the idea to the target group
Who is in the group	Typical people from the group you are trying to influence	Friends who know your situation but are not in your target group
How many participants	4-8	3-5

9.4 Developing your So-What Document

If you have decided to use an “advisory” focus group instead of a “test” focus group, go down to do 9.5 and 9.6 first. Then come back here to 9.4 and develop your So-What Document after you have received input from your advisory focus group.

If you have decided to use a “test” focus group, develop your So-What Document now according to the following worksheet. (If you run into problems with the worksheet, you may want to change your plan and do an advisory group (9.5) before you do the worksheet.)

Worksheet 9.4 Cover Sheet for Your So-What Document

If you are handing in your So-What Document to an instructor, attach the following cover sheet to it with your answers inserted. The instructor can then mark the document with reference to the goals you have set for it. If you are working on your own, use the cover sheet as your guide for developing your So-What Document.

This “Cover Sheet” has ten questions. Though called a “cover sheet,” it is seven pages long because it contains instructions and background information for each question. Each question is first stated in italics, then instructions are given, then the

question is repeated in this different font, and then you insert your answer.

The first question you are preparing to answer on this cover sheet is, *“What breakthrough are you praying that God will bring about through your project?”* Do not answer that question yet. Read the following instructions as you think about it. The same question will be repeated after the instructions, and you should answer it then. (All questions and instructions on this cover sheet will be presented in this same way.)

Reread items 1-3 on your Master Worksheet, which relate to your goal. That is what this question is asking you to re-state in light of your new insights. Your So-What Document is supposed to influence the thinking and action of a particular group of people in your organization or community. You are trying to change your world.

That may seem like an awesome responsibility, and in one sense it is. Take it seriously, but at the same time be realistic about setting your goal. You do not have to try to transform people completely with one short So-What Document. Just try to get them to take a good first step in the right direction. (See question 3 below for more specifics about this.)

Since your So-What Document is only trying to help people take the first step, it does not have to explain all the other steps that you hope will come. You may not have those steps figured out yet. Relax. The Lord rewards the faithful servant who works steadily with others, not the flamboyant one who quickly imposes his or her solution on everybody.

The more *ambitious, complicated and unrealistic* your So-What Document is and the more that people feel you are forcing it on them, the less likely they are to take even the first step you want them to. But once you get others agreeing to take that first step, the way starts to open up. You see that, “By his

mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope.” (Eph. 3:20, NLT) Now answer question 1:

1. What breakthrough are you praying that God will bring about through your project?

The second question will be, *“What is your action question, item 4 on your Master Worksheet, and in one sentence, what is your answer to it?”* Your So-What Document will be your first attempt to start doing whatever action this answer says should be done. You have already combined research and prayer, and you have discerned what the Lord wants you to do differently or to do next. Now you begin to do it. Your So-What Document may not relate to all aspects of the answer to question 2 but it will be a beginning, so keep this answer in mind as you go through the rest of this exercise. Answer question 2:

2. What is your action question, item 4 on your Master Worksheet, and in one sentence, what is your answer to it?

Third question: *“What group or groups of people are you hoping to influence through your So-What Document?”* Remember that your target group should be in or very near to your sphere of influence already. Don’t be too general, like, “I’m going to influence the Christians in my country.” Don’t go too high up, like, “I’ll influence the Ministry of Education to do such and such.” Now answer question 3, unless you first want to read a little more about group size.

More . . .

9.4.A Is your target group too large?

3. What group or groups of people are you hoping to influence through your So-What Document?

The fourth question is actually a pair of questions: *“What change(s) do you want to see in their attitudes and/or their view of themselves and their situation? What do you pray they will quit thinking/feeling and what will they think or feel instead?”*

More . . .

[9.4.B If you think you already covered this in your answer to question 1](#)

What kinds of changes should I promote?

The changes you want to influence people to make are changes in their thinking or attitude that will lead somehow toward the breakthrough result you described in your answer to Question 1. Your problem is to figure out which change or changes will do that.

Here are some options. Do not be confused if the change you are considering seems to fit into more than one of these categories. That often happens.

- Change in how they see themselves and/or their situation

The Kenyan head of an organization of about 30 people wanted to reduce the mistrust, resentment, and conflicts among the staff. He therefore wanted to change the way the staff members saw themselves. He wanted them to think of themselves more as a family in Christ and less as people from different tribes and backgrounds.

- Change in how they see you

An American woman was about to leave an organization where her ministry was going well. She felt the Lord wanted her to serve in a different place, but she thought some of her friends and colleagues might feel she was abandoning them. She wanted to change

their view so they would not think she was simply moving on to “greener pastures.”

- Change in how they see an issue or feel about it

A Liberian missionary was disappointed that women had so little influence in church and mission work. Nearly all the pastors in his city interpreted the Bible in the same way, as if it confirmed their cultural tradition that men should always be in charge of everything. They never discussed it. They just took it for granted. He wanted to begin some discussions that could lead them to separate traditional customs from New Testament instructions.

- Change in how they feel about participating in something

A Nigerian pastor/missionary was concerned that his congregation kept practicing some of their traditional religious customs that did not agree at all with faith in Jesus as the Lord of life. They did not seem to grasp the heart of the faith. It was difficult because he did not speak their language well and he had to use a trade language. He decided to focus on the Lord’s Prayer. He thought that if they really understood that and prayed it with their hearts and minds, their attitude toward the traditional customs would change.

- Change in a policy and/or a strategy

A Kenyan businessman was convinced that the standard fund-raising approach of pastors in his community was driving people away from the church. The long appeals every week were making it seem that church is all about money. He wanted his church elders to review the situation and change their policy. (Note: in this case, the So-What Document is aimed only at a committee. It may influence the whole church or denomination

but the influence will be indirect. The document is not meant for the whole community to read.)

- Change in what they do

All the other kinds of changes will eventually influence what people do, but some So-What Documents may be intended specifically for this. For example, a So-What Document could be a document for recruiting new members, getting people to attend an event, or getting them to adopt a new practice, such as farming in a particular way.

What is so dangerous about question 4 (changing people's thoughts and feelings)?

Question 4 asks you to decide what you will try to persuade other people to change. *This is probably the most dangerous decision anywhere in the Breakthrough process.* Research should contribute to change. Otherwise it has little value. But researchers must always use extreme caution when they are deciding what to change.

Your research has given you new insights into how they are thinking and feeling. You understand them better than you did before, but bringing change to other people is a very complex matter. You are not God. He has given you some insights about people but he never meant for you to try to run their lives for them.

How then do you decide what you should try to persuade them to change? You probably made several recommendations in your research report. Which one (or two?) of them will you use as the focus for your So-What Document? Logic and analysis may help you decide, but for something as delicate as this you want more than the best conclusion a human mind can produce. You want inspiration. Without inspiration you will not be able to make the creative leap from a

recommendation in your research report to your So-What Document and your breakthrough.

Get research and prayer working together for you. Pray for yourself as Paul prayed for the Colossians, "We ask God to give you a complete understanding of what he wants to do in your lives, and we ask him to make you wise with spiritual wisdom." (Col. 1:9, NLT).

Suggested prayer: Lord, thank you for the insights you gave me during the research and the write-up of my report. Now please grant me enough of your creativity that I can make the leap to my So-What Document. Inspire me and my thoughts. Plant your ideas in me. How do you want me to do this?

Now answer question 4, unless you first want to read "More . . ."

More . . .

9.4.C Will the So-What Document be easy or hard for you to write?

4. What change(s) do you want to see in people's attitudes and/or their view of themselves and their situation? What do you pray they will quit thinking/feeling and what will they think or feel instead?

The fifth question is, "What did you find out during your research that gives you a solid basis for whatever change you are promoting in your So-What Document?" If you could have written just as good a So-What Document before you did any research at all, then your document is not based on your research insights. It is only coming out of your own head, your previous experience, or the Bible. It may be

very good teaching or preaching, but it is not a good So-What Document because it does not prove that your research was worth doing.

Be very careful at this point, especially if you are a creative person. Do not use the So-What Document as your opportunity to say whatever you have been wanting to say about your concern ever since you started the project. You may honestly believe that your research has proved how right you were about this topic, but that is what all biased people think. Question 5 will help you see whether your So-What Document is biased or genuine. We call it the “Cow Horns Test.” It comes from a Zulu proverb:



Horns that are stuck onto a cow do not grow.

The point is that fake horns will soon be recognized as fakes. Fake reasoning and recommendations in a So-What Document may look good at first glance, but biased recommendations will not fool many people for

long. To be persuasive, recommendations must grow naturally out of the methods and the data of the research project, not be tacked on just because of your own opinion.

In one of the examples above, the Kenyan businessman suspected that the long financial appeals were driving people away from the churches. He did research and found that this was true. He could give sample statements from his interviews and percentages from his survey, showing that lots of people were unhappy with the constant push to give more. When he makes his appeal to the church elders in his So-What Document, he is not just expressing his own opinion. He is reporting a very wide-spread opinion. His request for a change in policy is growing naturally out of his data, like horns growing from the head of a cow. He could give a direct and clear answer to Question 5 below. Can you?

5. What did you find out during your research that gives you a solid basis for whatever change you are promoting in your So-What Document?

The sixth question will be: “*What kind of So-What Document will be most attractive and persuasive for the people you want to influence? (You may list two or three options.)*” You have many options. We will look at the format or type of document, the language, logic, and length.

Format or type of “document”

I am reluctant to suggest anything since I am afraid you may stick too closely to my suggestions and fail to think of other options that would be more effective in your case. With that warning, I will mention some possible types of So-What Documents in order to get your thinking started:

Table 9.4 Types of So-What Documents

Documents for small target groups	Documents for large target groups	“Documents” that are not actually documents used in printed form
a proposal to a committee	A brochure or leaflet	a program plan for a workshop
an action plan for a team or organization	A letter to the editor	a poster (or series of posters)
	A newspaper or journal article	a skit
	A poem	a taped presentation for radio broadcast (a one-minute public service message, an interview, or a short talk)
	A story like the Boma story in this guide	
	A handout sheet to go with a lecture or sermon	

Many other types of So-What Documents are waiting to be invented. (Note: A So-What Document is not a “To Do” list for you personally. It must be intended to influence others who read it, hear it, or participate in the program it outlines.)

Language

Since your So-What Document is written for your community or your organization not your instructor, it must be written in whatever language suits your people best. Remember that the question is not whether they can understand English; the question is whether English is the language most likely to persuade them of anything. Those are two very different things. (If your instructor does not speak the language of

your So-What Document, give him/her both the original and a translation.)

Logic

Use the appropriate type of logic and presentation for your audience. For example, statistics may help convince some people but alienate or confuse other people. A parable may be a powerful way to communicate with one type of person but have little influence on another type.

Length

Your pouch of ash (So-What Document) can be almost any shape and size. We recommend one to five pages. What matters is not how long it is but how well it works in your world and how far it takes you toward the breakthrough you need.

6. What kind of so-what document will be most attractive and persuasive for them? (You may list two or three options now and decide later which one is best.)

Seventh question (a pair of questions again): *“How interested are those people in the subject already, and how much respect do they have for you and your opinions generally? What do they already know or feel that would work in favor of the changes you desire?”*

Tone and style

You want your So-What Document to sound like something written by a good person, full of faith and the Holy Spirit (like Stephen, Acts 6:5). If you are not such a person, stop and invite the Lord to change you before you write. If you are manipulative, power-hungry, angry, or otherwise unfit to influence other people, they will sense it in your document.

Consider whether the people you are trying to influence are above you in status, below you, or on a par with you. Address them appropriately. Beware of getting so excited and convinced by your new insights that you try to impose them without realizing how you look to other people. Any hint of arrogance or condescension can ruin your So-What Document just as surely as a hint of the smell of manure would ruin the appetite of guests to whom you presented a beautiful dessert.

The rubber band principle

As you decide how forceful or how gentle to be in your So-What Document, a principle I learned from a wise old pastor friend may help. He called it the “rubber band principle” of leadership and change. The link between a leader and his/her followers (or a researcher and his/her circle of influence) is

like a rubber band. If the researcher does not pull on his or her end of the rubber band, the group on the other end is not influenced, but if the researcher gets too far ahead of them and pulls too hard, the rubber band breaks. It painfully snaps the researcher and his/her audience. Their connection ends and all hope of the researcher for further influence is lost. The researcher has to put optimal stretch on the rubber band in order to influence the group and bring them along. That is what your So-What Document needs to do.

7. How interested are those people in the subject already, and how much respect do they have for you and your opinions generally? What do they already know or feel that would work in favor of the changes you desire?

Eighth question: *“If the document existed, how would your target audience find out about it? What would draw them into reading it once they had a copy?”* If your target group is small, such as a committee or a leadership team, you can be fairly sure that they will read your So-What Document because they are going to discuss it together as a normal part of their work. If you are passing the document to people who report to you within your organization, you can require them to read it and you can schedule a meeting to discuss it. But in many cases, the So-What Document is aimed at a much wider group that you do not control. It then becomes very important for you to promote your document skillfully.

Your creativity and your knowledge of your target group both come into play here. First, consider whether your group is ever influenced by anything they read. Many people are not. Perhaps they need to hear someone

talking about it rather than be given a document to read. If so, choose one of the types of So-What “Documents” in the third column of Table 9.4 above.

Perhaps the people in your target group do read, but they prefer to read things that have diagrams and pictures. Give them what they are looking for. You may have had little practice at this because illustrations are so rarely used in term papers, but your So-What Document is not a term paper. It has to be interesting and attractive for your target group.

Your title is also a very important way to grab people’s attention. Spend some time developing three or four different titles for your document. Try them out with a friend or two to see which one gets the best response. Sometimes a key statistic or question on the cover of a brochure can be better than a title. For example, the cover might say, “How many of our youth think that the church is out of touch with them?” When they open the brochure, they see the figure you discovered, such as “82%.” Then you have their attention and you can build the rest of your case for change.

A proverb or a key quotation from one of your interviews may be used on the cover or in the opening paragraph of the body of the document. Words of this kind are much more potent than ordinary words of explanation.

Your target group has to find out somehow that your document exists, and they have to be motivated to look at it. A cover letter with an endorsement from a key person may get a lot more people to read your document than simply giving it away yourself. An announcement at a meeting or conference can

also help. Think carefully about the promotion of your document to your target group. Do not assume they will automatically pick it up and read it just because it exists.

8. If the document existed, how would your target audience find out about it? What would draw them into reading it once they had a copy?

Ninth question: “*Who might feel threatened or be embarrassed by your So-What Document even if you did not intend it?*” Since a So-What Document always promotes some kind of change, it often implies that something is wrong and needs to be changed. Thus there is the risk that people will start thinking about who is to blame. As the writer, you need to anticipate this. Do not excuse yourself by saying, “I am only working for good as God guides me. I have no ill will. I do not mean to attack anyone.” The important thing is not whether you intend an attack. It is whether anyone else *feels* you are attacking them. You need to know your situation well enough that you know whether anyone will feel like that when they see or hear about your So-What Document.

Sometimes you may believe in a change so strongly that you choose to promote it even though you know some people may feel it is an attack on them; however, do not promote a change that could embarrass people or your organization unless you have counted the cost. Sometimes the Lord requires you to risk those things, but do not risk them until you have spent some time praying in Gethsemane, making absolutely sure that you are doing the Father’s will and not your own.

You may wish to reread the earlier point about the danger of researchers coming to wrong conclusions or recommendations.

You may wish to read [the story of Mr. Makala](#) if you did not read it earlier. It relates to this danger.

9. *Who might feel threatened or be embarrassed by your So-What Document even if you did not intend it?*

Tenth and final question (three parts): *“Who else already did or is now doing something similar to the change you are proposing? Will they be offended if you do not mention their efforts in your So-What Document? Will anyone oppose your idea because it did not work when they tried it?”*

It is easy to assume that no one else is doing anything about the issue that is the focus of your So-What Document, but very often others are already involved. You want to find them and affirm their efforts rather than insult them by acting as if they are doing nothing. Embrace them. Perhaps you will even join them or partner with them instead of promoting your So-What Document on your own.

You also want to know whether anything similar to the change you are proposing has already been tried, perhaps before you joined the organization. If it was tried, it failed, and now your So-What Document seems to be recommending the same thing again because you did not know the story, your document is doomed.

10. *Who else already did or is now doing something similar to the change you are proposing? Will they be offended if you do not mention their efforts in your So-What Document? Will anyone oppose your idea because it did not work when they tried it?*

Review your decisions about your So-What Document in the above worksheet, especially Questions 4, 5, and 9. Once you are satisfied with them, go ahead and draft your So-What Document accordingly.

When you have finished drafting your document, look back over it and ask yourself, *“Does this look more like something done with God’s love and passion or something done as an assignment for a class?”* You do not have to tell your instructor the answer to that question. Answer it in your own heart. (Option: If you used an advisory focus group, you may want to go back to them, show them your draft, and let them comment before you make it public.)

When your target group sees your So-What Document, they will sense immediately whether it is driven by God’s passion or whether you were just going through the motions. If you realize now that your heart is still not in your document, back up. Pray until it is. Then rewrite whatever needs re-writing. It is a matter of life or death for your document.

9.5 Planning your focus group

Focus groups are often used during the data-gathering phase of a research project. The Breakthrough process uses them in a later phase in order to help you do something about the data you have gathered. As you use the following worksheet to plan your group, keep action in mind. Make all your planning decisions by choosing the path that is most likely to help you take the right action in the right way.

Worksheet 9.5 Planning Your Focus Group

1. Which type of group will you organize—an advisory group or a test group? If you are still not sure, [preview the instructions for the advisory group](#) or the [instructions for a test group](#).

More . . .

[9.5.A If you are thinking of doing both a test group and an advisory group](#)

2. About how many people will be in your group? How did you choose that number?

A test group should have 4-8 people and an advisory group should have 3-5. The larger the group, the harder it is to arrange a meeting time and lead the group discussion. Get people to commit to attend. Invite an extra person or two so you still have enough for a focus group even if not everyone comes as promised. Give everyone a reminder a few hours or a day before the meeting if possible.

3. How will you decide which people to include? What factors will affect your decision?

A test group should include people who represent the group you are trying to influence. An advisory group should include people who know your situation well enough to advise you about what will happen if you propose particular changes. Be careful to select people who are close enough in status that they feel comfortable expressing their opinions to each other. You want free-flowing group interaction, and that is very difficult if the people do not feel like peers.

4. How will you get their cooperation? Write a paragraph or so explaining what you are doing and what help you are requesting of them.

The main task of the focus group (whether advisory or test group) is to help you move from your research report to a So-What Document that works well in your situation. The focus group participants won't know what that means. Don't worry. You don't have to try to explain it to them. All they have to understand is that by participating in your group, they will be helping you improve your ministry in light of new insights from your research.

Remember that people are busy and many of them are living with pressing difficulties of their own. It will not be easy to get very many of them together in one time and place, but you really need their help.

5. How will you get them together? Are these people ever in one place at one time when you could ask them to stay for your meeting or is it necessary to set up a special meeting?

Researchers regularly underestimate the difficulty of arranging a meeting. Think about how many phone calls, visits, and follow-ups it will take before you get a scheduled time that works for everybody. Remember, "Resist wishful thinking." Be realistic or you may become very frustrated.

Capitalize on an existing meeting if you can. If it is a staff meeting, you may be able to use some or all of the meeting time for your focus group work. If it is another meeting, like a Sunday worship service, you may ask people to stay late for your meeting. If you do that, be alert for signs that people are getting eager to leave. Be sure to thank them for participating.

6. About how long do you think your focus group will meet? How much total time will it take you to travel to and from the meeting?

60-90 minutes is normal time for a focus group but not a rigid limit. When you invite people, give them a fair estimate of the time. Researchers are notorious for telling participants a group will take ten minutes and then keeping them for an hour.

7. Will you take notes yourself during the focus group meeting or have a friend do that for you? Why do you prefer the note-taking to be handled as you plan to do it?

As far as possible, avoid taking notes during the meeting because it can kill the discussion. If you take any, make them very brief, just enough to remind you of the point later. You may ask a friend to take notes for you, but not one of the participants. Set aside some time alone immediately after the meeting so you can go over your friend's notes and/or write down your own notes.

8. How will you let people know that you appreciated their participation? Will you provide any food or drink during or after the session? Transportation money? Will any of them expect any gift from you? If so, how will you know and how will you handle it?

Appreciate your participants, and let them know you do. This is your project, not theirs. They deserve your gratitude if they are willing to give you some of their time and input.

Sometimes a gift is appropriate; sometimes not. Whatever you do, clarify this before the focus group. Don't wait till afterwards to discover the participants are expecting something that you were not planning to give.

9.6 Conducting the focus group

9.6.1 Instructions for both kinds of focus groups

Before you look at the specific instructions for your advisory group (9.6.2) or test group (9.6.3), here are a few guidelines that apply to both types.

Explain at the beginning that participants will help you a lot more if they respond to each other instead of just to you. You ask or say just enough to get the discussion going. Do not try to respond to every

comment. Be quiet sometimes and leave space for people to realize they are controlling the conversation. If they drift too far away from the main topic, gently bring the discussion back to your focus.

- Ask a couple of the participants to pray for the meeting at the beginning and perhaps again during the discussion when that seems appropriate. Praying together often changes the feel of the group in helpful ways, and it reminds everyone that the goal is to discover together what God wants you to do.
- As in any group you are leading, be aware of which people are talking too much or

too little. Try to get the talkative ones under control and the shy ones to open up. For example, you may say, “Good. Now let’s hear from some people who have not expressed their views on this question yet.”

9.6.2 Instructions for an advisory focus group

Note: use these instructions BEFORE you write your So-What Document. If you have already written your So-What Document, use the [instructions for a test focus group](#).

If your focus group will be an advisory group, it will discuss how you should change your approach to your action question (item 4 on your Master Worksheet) now that you have new insights from your interviews about your insight question (item 5 on your Master Worksheet). Get the group’s input on one or more of the following things:

- *Which of the recommendations in your research report should become the focus of your So-What Document. Which is the crucial one? Which is the one you could do the most to change? Which one is the Lord pointing to for your next step?*
- *Which type of So-What Document you should prepare. It helps the focus group if you briefly outline two or three ideas you have for ways to do a So-What Document. Fill out a “Cover Sheet” for each idea. Have them discuss questions 4, 5 and 6 on these cover sheets.¹⁰ How difficult will it be to carry out each idea? What would be good about each way of doing it? What could go wrong with each approach? (If you have trouble filling out the other questions on the Cover Sheet on*

¹⁰ The other questions on the Cover Sheet might be answered the same way for all your ideas. If so, you do not have to fill them in three times. Just write in your different answers to 4, 5, and 6 if that is the only difference between the three Cover Sheets.

your own, you may ask your group to discuss the whole sheet, but that will make your group meeting longer.)

- *How to promote the So-What Document after it is prepared. Who needs to authorize it before you promote it? How will it get circulated? How will you get anyone to notice it? Who can help you promote it?*

By the end of the focus group, see if you can get the group to reach a consensus about whatever issue(s) you put before them. Do not be content with just hearing a lot of ideas.

DANGER: if you have an advisory group, beware of three common hazards:

- You might eat up most of the group time by explaining your research in too much detail. To avoid this, limit your presentation to about 10 minutes and use your Master Worksheet and your Cover Sheet as your outline.
- They might tell you *too little* of their opinion, that is, they will only tell you what they think you want to hear.
- They might tell you *too much* of their opinion, trying to replace your research conclusion with the “real” answer they think you should have found.

More . . .

[Back to Action 9.4 to produce your So-What Document \(if your group worked well\)](#)

[9.6.2.A Panic button if your advisory group does not work well](#)

9.6.3 Instructions for a test group

If your focus group will be a test group, use your So-What Document with them and see how well it works, that is, how many people respond to the document’s main suggestion

in the way you hope they will. You defined your aim when you completed item 4 on the Cover Sheet.

Your test is simple. *Present your So-What Document and ask the test group to discuss whether this document is ready for use with other people or if it needs some more work first.* Help them discuss by using some questions such as these:

- What do you think was the main thing I am proposing? How would you explain it to somebody?
- What did you like about it? What was convincing?
- What did not seem very clear?
- Did anything about it make you nervous or uncomfortable?
- What do you think will happen if I start promoting this idea a lot? Are people ready for it? Will anybody be hurt or threatened by it?
- Do you think that promoting this idea is worth a lot of my time, some of my time, or only a little of my time? Is this such an important issue that you want to help me work on it?

As you run your test, be watching for things like these:

- How interesting is the document and the presentation to them? How difficult was it to get them to attend and to involve them in discussion once they were there?
- How clearly do they understand your main suggestion?
- How open are they to the suggestion?
- How likely are they to do anything about it after they leave the meeting? Are they deeply moved or just saying what is polite during the meeting?

- Has their input helped you rethink or refine your main suggestion in any way before you try to use it with other people? What will you do differently next time?

You do not ask them these questions, of course. You keep these questions in mind for your own evaluation after the meeting.

The focus group method complements all the other research methods involved in the Breakthrough process. The *case study* method helped you define your problem. The *interview* and *survey* methods helped you gather your data. Now the *focus group* method helps you apply your insight. All along the way you continued to use the *participant observation* method, which is already part of your normal life. When you start using your So What Document, you will be using the *experimentation* method just as you do whenever you try something new.

9.7 Following through on your So-What Document

This chapter is titled, “Taking Inspired Action” because your goal is to take the action, not merely to imagine it, describe it theoretically, or plan it. You imagine, describe, and plan as you prepare your So-What Document. Then it is time to follow through by taking action. *No follow-through, no breakthrough.*

Here are some parts of the follow-through process. Many will be familiar to you already.

Suggested prayer: Pray down through the items in the following list, spending as much time on each point as you need to or desire to. Then fill out **Worksheet 9.7.4 Follow-Through**.

9.7.1 Opening up to God

- Committing the whole So-What Document to God
- Confirming that your main recommendation (Item 2 in “Developing Your So-What Document” above) really is God’s idea, not merely yours
- Inviting God to tell you anything else he wants to before you promote that idea

9.7.2 Strengthening your connections in the Body of Christ

- Blessing the people who share your concern about this issue
- Praying for fruitful connections with researchers whose insights are similar to yours
- Praying for power for those who are already working for the things you propose

9.7.3 Focusing prayer on the places where change will occur

- In yourself and what you control
- In situations where you have some influence but not control
- In situations where your friends have influence
- Widespread change at the popular level

9.7.4 Focusing prayer on your style as a servant of Christ the King

- *Prayerful*—depending on Jesus and admitting freely that you cannot finish the project and get a breakthrough in your own strength.
- *Humble*—remembering that the point of the breakthrough is to bring glory to God, not to end your personal frustration, show how clever you are, or increase your power over other people. (This theme is discussed again in section 10.2, “The Humility Gap.”)
- *Diligent*—the prevailing virtue in the book of Proverbs; excellent ancient wisdom for modern researchers.
- *Faithful*—the complementary partner of diligence in the book of Proverbs; we work diligently for breakthroughs but at the same time we have faith that God will grant them as gifts to us.

With these prayers you come to *the climax of the course, taking the “inspired actions” you have planned* on the basis of your breakthrough insights.

Worksheet 9.7.4 Follow-Through

1. What did God impress upon you just now as you were recommitting the whole project to him, and particularly the So-What Document?
2. List the first three to five people you intend to show your So-What Document to. How are you going to connect with what they are already doing about your concern? How will they connect with you as you begin to work for your practical breakthrough?
3. What exact changes are you praying your So-What Document will help bring about in each of the following areas:
 - In yourself and what you control:
 - In situations where you have some influence:
 - (Optional) In situations where your friends have influence:
 - (Optional) Widespread change at the popular level:

4. What breakthrough would occur in your ministry situation if the above changes occurred?
5. If you had four hours right now to begin working on these changes, how would you spend the time?
6. Plan to invest four hours sometime this week doing whatever you wrote in Item 5 above. What else will you do to follow through within one week?
7. What else will you do within one month?
8. What else will you do within three months, depending on what happens in the early stages?

More . . .

Review the "Get R.E.A.L." principles so you can apply them to your follow-through.

Suggested prayer: *Merciful and patient Lord, make my organizational leaders patient with me and make me patient with them. Let us all move together toward the breakthrough you have for us, even if this means my recommendations must be refined through the advice of others.*

Meet with your in-house supervisor for a progress check on analyzing your data and making your recommendations. Use the guidelines below.

Worksheet 9.8 Progress Check with In-house Supervisor

1. What you have provisionally decided

Let your supervisor read your research report and your So-What Document. Get his/her input on two main things:

- How well the report answers the insight question you started with
- How "inspired" your recommendations look and how much impact they may have

If your supervisor wants you to reconsider any of your conclusions or applications, that is what you need to do, even if you have already submitted one or both documents to your classroom instructor.

2. What you have been praying

Explain to your supervisor what you would like him/her to pray for you at this stage of the Breakthrough process.

3. What you have been reading

What are one or two of the most helpful insights, instructions, or sections that you have read in this guide, Robson, or other sources during these steps? Summarize or quote them very briefly, just enough so your supervisor can see how your thinking is being influenced.

4. What you expect to do next

Ask your supervisor for any additional suggestions. How might you adjust your plans for circulating the So-What Document and implementing the recommendations in order to get more results? His/her experience may save you a lot of time and frustration as you begin working for change.

5. Planned date and time of final meeting _____**Articles in Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org)**

- “Focus groups” (Strengths and weaknesses are described. The paragraph, “In marketing,” corresponds to what we have called a “test group.” There is no specific parallel in the article to what we have called an “advisory group.”)

Readings in Robson, *Real World Research*, 2nd ed.

Pages	Starting point (section or chapter title)	Notes and instructions
220	“Assumptions for Those Wishing To Initiate Change”	<i>Possibly the most important page in Robson’s book.</i>
284-289	“Focus Groups”	Robson describes focus groups as part of the data gathering step, not the application step (as we are using them). However, most of his points apply.
514-519	“Writing for Non-Academic Audiences”	
524-525	“Afterword”	Robson’s plea for realism and humility in working for change.
534-544	“The Roles of the Practitioner-Researcher, Researchers and Consultants in Real World Research”	These pages may be the ones you refer to most often in years to come. Excellent summary of the way to combine all three kinds of people in research. Note especially pp. 541-542, which are very important for moving from a written document to an actual impact on people.

A Blessing

Blessings on you as you look for the practical implications that grow naturally from your insights. May the Holy Spirit grant you inspired ideas and the right combination of passion, wisdom, and power as you implement them.

10. WATCHING GOD'S GLORY BREAK THROUGH

*Asking the right questions
to the right people in the right way
in order to gather information that provides fresh insight
leading toward creative recommendations and actions
according to God's will and **for his glory**. (cf. Phil. 1:9-11)*

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10.0 Introduction

Boma Hopes for Success

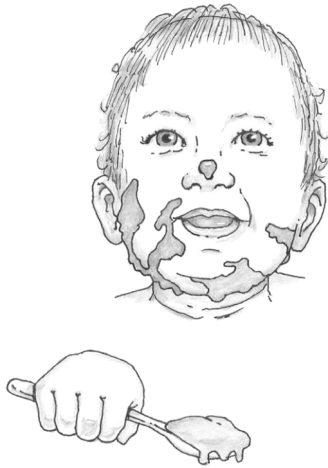
Boma waited till the moon was overhead. Then he mixed the ash with spring water and smeared it on the west wall as the diviner had ordered. He slept better that night, but he was still watching for that huge black mamba the next morning. It would be a few days before he could be sure the medicine was working.

Now we see Boma implementing the diviner's recommendation, which he hopes has enough spiritual power to solve his problem. He does not trust the diviner completely, but if the experiment works and no more trouble comes to him, he will be satisfied and he will give the diviner credit for the protection. If the experiment fails, he will be in great difficulty because neither his own research nor divination has revealed

the answer he wants. He won't know where to turn or how to protect his family.

We close our reflections on Boma by noting that even if some of his assumptions and methods are not valid starting points for research, he has gotten one thing right that most research students get wrong. Unlike them, he did not do his research because he was going to write a thesis or earn a degree. He couldn't even write! He did the research because it would affect his life and the lives of those he cared about. He expected it to make a difference in the real world. Your research should too. You should want the glory of God more than anything, and you should want it to show up in the real world not the classroom.

The proof of the value of your research is in the effect it has on you and your ministry. Are you bringing more glory and less shame



The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

to God now than you were before? Hopefully the answer is yes because of the new insights you have into your ministry situation.

10.1 Joy

If you really are interested in the glory of God, you should be full of joy as you begin to see how he will be more glorified because of the changes your research insights have led to. Could anything make you more happy, connected, fulfilled, and significant than serving him better than before? Take some time to enjoy it and praise him for it. Start by reflecting on it with the following worksheet:

Worksheet 10.1 Savoring Your Breakthrough

1. What do you know that you did not know before?
2. What are you doing differently than before?
3. How are you a different person?
4. How have your connections with others improved?
5. Where and how is God granting you a breakthrough?

Suggested prayer: Thank God for everything you have written in the list above. Take time to imagine where it might be going; perhaps spend ten or fifteen minutes praying and praising God about each answer.

More . . .

10.1.A Get a little carried away with your celebrating

10.1.B What if there is no breakthrough to celebrate, at least not yet?

There is a method in this “madness.” *God-given joy is not only the natural result of the breakthrough you just received; it is the supernatural preparation for the next one.* Joy generates power. The more joyful you are, the more breakthroughs you can expect.

This principle of joy and power goes back to the dawn of creation. The Creator anticipated that some of us (especially the deeply committed missionary types) would be so industrious that we would work ourselves to death, supposedly for his glory. To save us from doing that and embarrassing him in the process, he decided to punctuate our lives with regular days of joy. These are Sabbath days to relax and savor his breakthroughs new and old, days to ignore the next five or ten unsolved problems. So take the break God has graciously commanded and entitled you to take. Give him the glory he deserves for the breakthrough he is giving you now and the ways he is helping you grow into your ministry.

More . . .

[10.1.C Biblical examples](#)

10.2 The Humility Gap

Being human, we can easily get arrogant as we savor our breakthrough. We get overly impressed with ourselves, our research and our recommendations. God has provided a wonderful safeguard for us in the research process itself. I call it the “*Humility Gap*.”

The Humility Gap is what keeps experienced researchers humble as they write their conclusions and promote their recommendations. The gap is the gap between what the researcher already knows and what he/she is trying to find out. For example, we may say that at the beginning of your project you

already knew three things about a situation but wanted to find out two more things in order to get a complete understanding and recommend a wise course of action. Your Humility Gap was two questions wide.

By doing research you discovered the two desired things. You now know five things instead of three, but you have not eliminated your Humility Gap. While you were discovering the two things you were after, you accidentally also discovered that there were three other questions you had not thought of, so your situation has eight elements, not five. Even though you know more than you did before, your Humility Gap has increased from two questions to three. In fact, it may be larger than three because you also stumbled onto one new insight that makes you wonder if you might have been mistaken in one of the original three things you thought you knew.

If you go on to study the three new questions and the one older item that is now in doubt, it is almost certain that more new questions will come up, keeping you humble. The principle is that research makes your knowledge and your ignorance (or at least your awareness of the extent of your ignorance) increase at the same time. Research by finite humans does produce new, valuable insights but it never gets to the bottom of anything. The Humility Gap never closes.

There are three ways to respond to the Humility Gap:

- Overlook it and think you have solved everything. That leads to arrogant recommendations. If you take that approach, you are like a person who goes to great lengths to get his car out of a mud hole (solve his ministry problem), then gets

behind the wheel and carelessly drives the car off a cliff.

- Leave the real world for the ivory tower of academia. You become a career researcher, recommending more research into the new questions that have come up but rarely venturing to propose any action in the real world.
- Go ahead and make recommendations but make them humbly, realizing that your research and your knowledge are partial. You remain open to God, relying on him to keep guiding you.

Given these three possible responses to the Humility Gap, reflect for a moment on how the Humility Gap has worked in your case. What new questions or aspects of your topic do you now realize you would like to know,

though you were not aware of them at the beginning? How do these unknowns affect you as you make recommendations based on your research so far?

Even though you see and appreciate the Humility Gap, you may still be bubbling over with excitement and pleasure about your breakthrough insights and their implications for your ministry. If you are, other people will notice. Some of them will ask you about it. When they do, you need to be able to discern the casual questions from the deeper ones, and you need to respond at the appropriate level. This is a sign of your humility because it shows that you do not expect everyone else to be as interested in the details of your topic as you are.

Worksheet 10.2 Casual Conversations About Your Research

Suppose someone says, "You did a research project? What was it about?" Write down your response on all three levels described on the following worksheet. After writing, be sure to read the warning that follows the worksheet.

Level 1: Quickie. Write your answer in the form of one sentence fragment. Describe one or two situations where this would be the right answer to give.

Level 2: Moderate. Write your answer in two or three sentences. Describe one or two situations where this would be the right answer to give.

Level 3: Serious. List a few of the topics (including your insight question and two or three of your most important insights or recommendations) that you would add to the basic description in Level 2. Describe one or two situations where this would be the right answer to give.

DANGER: The most common mistake for a new researcher is to give a Level 3 answer to a Level 1 question. This brings research into disgrace. It shows that the researcher is a poor listener, not the perceptive kind of listener this guide claims to produce. Be perceptive. Never give a long answer to a short question about your research.

10.3 What if there is no breakthrough to enjoy?

Throughout the Breakthrough process you have been getting your hopes up. Even though you knew this process is not guaranteed to work for everyone, you were praying and to some extent expecting it would work for you. What if those expectations were not met? If your breakthrough is still nowhere in sight, do not despair. There are at least eight possible explanations, any of which can help you move on from here with trust in God.

10.3.1 Is God steering you toward further study of the same concern?

Perhaps you came at your topic from the wrong angle. It is not unusual for researchers to realize toward the end of a research project, "Oh, what I should have been focusing on all along was . . ." This is both disappointing and encouraging. It is disappointing because they probably will not have time to go back and gather enough of the right information to get their breakthrough during the time period of their Breakthrough project. It is encouraging because now they know where to look. They have discovered what they were unable to guess at the beginning. This is very worthwhile research, stretching them and getting them into position for an eventual Breakthrough.

Or perhaps you came at your topic from the correct angle but it turned out that the issue was larger than anyone could solve with the size of project you did. Your concern had more layers and complications than you expected, and you may now know what those layers are but it will take some time to explore them. God may be telling you that you are on the right track but you will need to commit a year or a few years to doing more study (perhaps a graduate degree) on this subject because it is so important. Your

breakthrough may come toward the end of that process if you are faithful.

10.3.2 Did you make a procedural mistake?

If you stumbled at any point during the Breakthrough process, your conclusion and recommendation may be misguided. You may need to work back through your steps with the help of a friend to see if you accidentally did something that spoiled your work. You might look for a wrong assumption you made at the beginning. Perhaps your questions were not penetrating enough. Perhaps you actually have a breakthrough insight in your data but you did not recognize it yet. Perhaps it was a combination of weaknesses in various parts of your work. Pray that the Lord will guide you to the problem area and enable you to fix it.

10.3.3 Was the real answer behind Door 1 or Door 2?

You ruled these possibilities out at the beginning of your project, but now you may need to go all the way back to the beginning and reconsider them. A Door 3 solution (new understanding and insight) will not give you a breakthrough on a Door 1 (sinfulness) or Door 2 (evil powers) problem.

10.3.4 Is the real answer hidden because you researched a superficial symptom, not the actual problem?

This is perhaps the most difficult and sobering of all the possible explanations. For example, you may do research on the content of the New Testament survey class you are teaching at a Bible college, hoping the research will help you redesign the course so it has more impact on the students. But if most of the students are only in the course so they can practice their English in hopes of getting a better secular job, no adjustments you make to course content will increase the

course's impact. Or if most of the students have personally withdrawn from you because they perceive you as an arrogant foreigner, your research on course content will not change anything.

Sometimes a Breakthrough project will help expose an underlying problem much deeper than the one the researcher had noticed at the beginning. Other times a researcher can do the whole project and be just as clueless at the end as at the beginning. If you suspect that is your situation, pray hard and get help, especially from sympathetic local people.

10.3.5 Are you mature enough to handle a big success?

If you had received a huge breakthrough, would you have been tempted to take credit for it? The bad effect of the new arrogance may have outweighed the good effect of the breakthrough. Perhaps you just need some time to grow and some practice at giving God the glory for things. He may trust you with a bigger breakthrough when he sees your character can handle it. He certainly does not want to feed your pride by giving you too much success before you have learned how to give him credit for every success, however small.

More . . .

[10.3.5.A Example – wanting to prove yourself](#)

10.3.6 Is it a question of God's timing?

Perhaps you have done nothing wrong and you are not supposed to do any further research, but God withholds your breakthrough or postpones it to an unknown time. If that happens, serve him in the meantime, fruit or no fruit. He absolutely loves to see diligence and faith in his children. He may spring his breakthrough on you in a

way and at a time that you would have least expected, or he may find other ways of letting you know he has not forgotten you.

More . . .

[10.3.6.A Example – Gethsemane](#)

10.3.7 Were you just going through the motions of research in order to pass a required course?

This does not take much explaining. If all you expected from the Breakthrough process was some academic credit, that is probably all you got. Perhaps you never expected that research would help your ministry, you did not seriously and expectantly pray for a breakthrough, and you are therefore neither surprised nor disappointed that no breakthrough came. I'm sorry this course has not bridged the gap between classroom and ministry for you. I hope that other courses will. Remember that Christ the King doesn't care one bit how many courses you pass and how many degrees you earn, but he cares passionately about the quality of the ministry you do in his name.

10.3.8 Is your work going to contribute to someone else's breakthrough rather than your own?

This problem may not be about you. What a fascinating thought! Though during the Breakthrough process you were properly focused on getting your own breakthrough, God may have had in mind that your report and So-What Document would actually contribute to someone else's breakthrough at a later time. Your work may plant a seed that grows in someone else's life. You may never meet that person but you may have contributed greatly to his/her growth and effectiveness through what you have written.

As you look over the eight possibilities above, remember your freedom in Christ. As

his followers we are not commanded or required to get breakthroughs. We naturally desire them and sometimes we do get them by God's grace, but they are not the standard by which we will be judged. Do not think of yourself as a failure or allow anyone else to imply that you failed because your breakthrough has not come as quickly or splendidly as you thought it might.

Leave the judgment to God. His standard is not visible success but faithfulness, abiding in Christ as branches in the vine. If we do that, then Jesus says the fruit-bearing will take care of itself and God will get the glory (Jn. 15:4-8).

Suggested prayer: Lord Jesus, whatever else happens or doesn't happen with my breakthrough concern, let me finish the Breakthrough process closer to you than I have ever been. If I let you down at any point along the way, please reveal it and I will change it. I know that you did not let me down. Thanks for being with me in my disappointment, just like you will be with me when my breakthrough comes. May I always find my joy in your presence more than in my success. You are one amazing friend and Master.

Decision 10.3.8. If you are not seeing much of a breakthrough yet, which of the above eight explanations do you think is the best one for your situation? What, if anything, do you believe God wants you to do about it at this time?

10.4 Bridging from your Breakthrough project to your full thesis

Note: If you are not going on to a full thesis, skip to [section 10.5](#).

In chapter 1 you previewed some of the ways your Breakthrough project could lead to a full thesis. Now reconsider your options in more detail, using the guidelines below.

1. *Expand the "Insights" section of your research report by turning each sub-section into a full chapter in your thesis.* This involves very little re-thinking, just digging a little deeper into each main aspect of your topic. You may need to adjust your hypotheses so that you have one hypothesis as the focus for each sub-section. Write some additional field questions for each sub-section and use a larger sample group so you are not merely repeating what you did in the small project.
2. *Take one of your own recommendations for further research.* Your research report recommended that someone should do further study of some unresolved issues that emerged from your research. You could be that someone. You may be able to include this in the expansion described in item 1 above, or it may be more like item 11 below, involving a major change.
3. *Enlarge your sample group but do not change anything else.* This is the simplest way to build on your Breakthrough project because it lets you use most of the same questions. For example, in your Breakthrough project you may have interviewed only ten people from your community. If the community has 5000 people, you can not make any safe

- generalizations about it from ten interviews. For your thesis you could do another 30 or 40 interviews and do a survey of 100 people. DANGER: This simple approach may not be the best approach. Use it only if A) your research work so far was really a struggle for you and the other options in this list look too complicated, or B) your deep desire is that your research should reach a firm conclusion about a larger population, and that requires a larger sample group.
4. *Add two or three more populations.* You may have already studied the relations of teachers and students in the school where you teach. You could do the same study in two or three more schools and compare the results. Or you may have studied student grievances that led to a school strike. For your thesis you could study the perspective of other populations such as faculty, administration, parents, and/or community leaders on those same grievances. This would give a more complete picture of the situation. An advantage of this approach is that you can cut and paste most of your previous research report into your thesis as one of the chapters.
 5. *Divide your population into two or more sub-groups (sub-populations).* You may have studied the depth of Christian commitment in your congregation and noticed that the commitment level seemed to be different between men and women or between youth, adults, and the elderly. However, you did not measure these differences during your first study. Now you can go back and sub-divide your population into the groups that you want to measure, study, and compare. An advantage of this approach is that you can use most of the same questions. You simply tally the answers separately for the different groups so you can compare them.
 6. *Re-word your insight question.* You may have felt that you covered your insight question in your project already and you now need to stretch the question so it is big enough to justify a thesis. Or you may have felt at the end of your project, "Oh, now I realize that what I should have asked was . . ." Build on that realization. Revise your insight question or write a new one from a fresh perspective and develop your thesis around it, starting with new hypotheses. It may overlap with your previous insight question a lot or only a little. Note that several of the other approaches in this list will require some adjustment in your insight question too, but that will be obvious.
 7. *Improve, drop, or replace one or more of your hypotheses.* Check all the hypotheses you plan to use again in your thesis research. You can probably improve them in light of your findings so far. One or two of your hypotheses may not have produced any insight so drop them before you start your thesis. You may have stumbled onto a new aspect of your topic during your project that you want to include in your thesis. Add a new hypothesis about it.
 8. *Change your field questions even though you keep everything else the same.* You may have realized that your field questions were poor the first time. They did not really prove or disprove your hypotheses. They did not give you much depth. It is possible to keep your insight question and your hypotheses as they are but

write more penetrating field questions so you get insight you did not get before. For your thesis you will use a larger sample group, but if the questions are different, you could ask them to some of the same people.

9. *Change your research methods.* During your Breakthrough project you were required to use certain methods at certain points. For example, you used the focus group method after you gathered your data. In your thesis you could use it earlier as part of your data gathering process. Similarly you did a small survey in your project, but in your thesis you could decide not to do a survey at all or to depend very largely on a survey.
10. *Run an experiment with your "So-What Document" to see how well it is working.* This is a form of "action research," reflecting with your colleagues on an action you are taking together. You could measure change in your population due to change in your ministry approach (a longitudinal study, that is, a study of the same people over a set length of time).
11. *Switch to a different topic entirely.* This is unusual and drastic but it may be the best option in some cases. For example, a new issue may have come up in your ministry since you started your Breakthrough project, and it now appears to be much more important than the other issue you were researching. Or you may feel you have solved that other issue already and you are taking effective action on it. Obviously it is more work to start from scratch on a new topic than to carry on with the previous one, but it is worth it if you are getting deeper into your real

issues and closer to the answers God wants to show you.

DANGER: As you are bridging to your plan for a thesis, beware of making your plan too ambitious or complicated. For example, we recommend you choose three or four sub-topics of your insight question and develop each one into a chapter of your thesis. However, we allow five or six. If you instantly expand to six or even go to seven or eight, it is roughly equivalent to tying a mule onto your shoulders before you start a five-kilometer race. Don't go above four sub-topics unless your insight question absolutely demands it. Remember that incomplete theses (and the world is full of them) never receive a passing grade.

Suggested prayer: Oh, Lord, I am staggered when I think how much time and effort I am going to put into this thesis research. Please don't let me waste it. Help me choose the most crucial questions, the ones that will do the most good for my ministry and others. Guide me to issues I will still be excited about studying and discussing two years from now. Save me from mediocre topics and lead me toward fascinating truths.

10.5 Enjoying more than a breakthrough

Becoming a different person is the real challenge in the Breakthrough process. If you "succeed" in your research process but fail to become a different person in the process, you have failed the Lord. His grace and power

are aimed at transforming you, helping you grow into a different person during your research.

This is a fabulous prospect. Think of it! And get the party started. If God's power and grace are transforming you, that is really something to celebrate. Whether you already have a visible breakthrough in your situation or not, you can celebrate something more important – becoming a different person. If that has happened during the Breakthrough process, it opens a whole new world of possibilities for the future. God only knows what you may be getting into position for. Consider the following two key ways his grace may transform you:

10.5.1 Better at listening to God

All through this process I have been hammering the importance of listening to God. The reason is obvious – leaders who listen to God are better leaders than those who are too busy, too self-confident, too fearful, or too corrupt to seek his wisdom and sense his leading. Listening carefully to God is the biggest single difference between a good leader and a poor one. Becoming highly skilled at listening to God can save leaders from the effects of their deficiencies in many other areas. Being weak in this area can doom their leadership even if they have many natural leadership strengths.

Yet many Christian leaders are not listening to God nearly as much or as carefully as they could be. They know it is the right thing to do but everything about leadership is working to prevent them from it. The higher that leaders go, the more responsibility they carry and the more they need to spend time in prayer and meditation, but the less time they have to do so. A hundred obligations, crises, and people clamor for their attention.

That is the life of a leader, and doing a Breakthrough project will not reduce those pressures on you. In fact, it may increase them, especially if you are also earning a graduate degree. But if the process of doing the research helps you become better at listening to God, you will be better equipped to deal with all the pressures that are going to come to you as a leader for years or decades to come. That's what I want for you.

10.5.2 Better at listening to other people

Besides becoming better at listening to God, the other main area for you to change is in your skill at listening to other people. You have acquired various tools to improve at this, especially the skill of asking the right questions in the right way.

Many leaders assume that leading is basically a matter of telling other people what to do. That is leadership as talking. I am teaching leadership as listening. As the Sesotho proverb puts it, "A chief is a chief by the people" (that is, "by listening to the people"). After you listen long enough and well enough, you are in a position to talk and to lead.

Effective leaders are always leaders who are good at listening to the people around them. This creates good relationships with staff and good morale in the organization. It opens the way for the leader to benefit from the spiritual gifts, the talents, the knowledge, and the experience of many other people. It helps both the leader and the staff understand the people they are trying to serve.

If this guide has made you a better listener, more appreciative of and attentive to those around and under you, it has served its purpose.

10.5.3 Better connected in relationships of mutual accountability

During your project you experienced mutual accountability, hopefully in a way that made you better at constructively providing accountability for others and more aware of the advantages of being held accountable yourself. How well did you learn to “love accountability”?

The experience, if it worked, may have connected you at a deep level with your in-house supervisor, your study partners, and others. You may even have made some life-long friends this way.

10.5.4 Better at integrating prayer and research

I said at the beginning of the process that prayer and research are not substitutes for each other. Let’s go a step further now. You will learn by your own experience that prayer and research actually feed off each other. The more research you do, the more you know what to pray and how badly you need to pray about it. The more you pray, the more clearly you realize which of your concerns should be turned into research projects and the more understanding you gain as you do those projects. You live a life of prayer and research.

You are different now because during your Breakthrough project you convinced yourself of the value of research as part of the process of finding God’s will in your ministry decisions. How can you afford not to find God’s will? So keep putting things into your “Research Ideas for Prayer” file, talking to people about them, and asking God which of them you should go to work on.

More . . .

10.5.4.A A note to busy leaders

10.5.5 More effective at working for change

The experience of implementing your So-What Document has equipped you to work for changes of many kinds in your future years of leadership, whether in your own organization, among your professional peers, or in the wider community. This is a key part of the difference between the old you (before your research) and the new you (afterward).

Some people say they are “different” after their research because they used to be without a graduate degree, and now they have one. They frame their degrees and mount them on the office wall, expecting that influence will somehow radiate from the paper and all who see it will be impressed. But that is only a difference in status. What does God care about that?

A real, God-pleasing difference is a difference inside the person, a result of the grace and wisdom of God working in there, reshaping the person into one who is different in all the traits and skills I have described — *better at listening to God and other people, more accountable, better at combining prayer and research, better at working for change*. Those differences are causes for celebration, and they are within your reach.

Note: After reading the section above, you may want to expand your answer to question 3 (“How are you a different person?”) on the worksheet where you reflected on your project.

Meet with your in-house supervisor for a final time of discussion and prayer. Use the guidelines below.

Worksheet 10.5.5 Final Meeting with In-house Supervisor

1. *Savoring your breakthrough*

Go through Worksheet 10.1, "Savoring Your Breakthrough," with your supervisor. This is a summary of the whole Breakthrough course.

2. *Disappointment?*

If your breakthrough is less than you were hoping for, talk to your supervisor about your feelings and prayers. Then discuss the [eight possible explanations](#) and decide what to do next.

3. *What you expect to do next*

Discuss what you expect to do next about your insights and/or the breakthrough that is starting to appear.

4. *Thanking your supervisor*

Be sure to thank your supervisor for his/her encouragement, prayer, and input throughout the process. Hopefully you now know your supervisor better and appreciate him/her more.

5. *Thinking beyond your own project*

Who else do you know who needs a breakthrough in his/her ministry? Consider recommending this guide to them, or at least the particular bits that proved most useful to you.

10.6 The big Breakthrough

One of the delights of being a follower of Jesus is that we get to look forward to the Big One, the day when "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15). All our little breakthroughs are like drops of rain on the sidewalk, indicators that the cloudburst—the Big One—is about to come.

What is a drop of rain on the sidewalk? In itself it is nothing. But as a sign of what is coming, it is incredibly important. It is a sample of the future dropped into the present. It is a tiny event of enormous significance because there is so much more where this came from.

Suggested prayer: "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). *Come among us now as a foretaste of the cloudburst, the Big One. We long for the Breakthrough to end all breakthroughs. Come visibly so all the world can see you as King. Come, Lord Jesus.*